

Enter To Win New Tack and Apparel, p. 16

# Dressage

T O D A Y

October 2015

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Boyd Martin,  
p. 41

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# Dressage TODAY Content

OCTOBER 2015



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Ehren Volk, riding Vaya Con Dios, and Shannon Peters

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Photo by Terri Miller

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 Intro Level

 Training Level

 First Level

 Second Level

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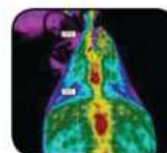
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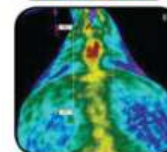


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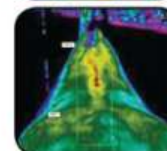
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**F12 The Ultimate Winter Gear Guide**  
*By Kat Neis and Lindsay Paulsen*  
Tips from the pros to help you select the best winter gear for you and your horse.



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## online extras

- ▶ Read articles from the current issue
- ▶ Searchable training article database



## dressage blogs

- ▶ "Viewpoints From C"—follow USEF senior dressage judge and FEI-level competitor Margaret Freeman on her dressage journeys.
- ▶ "Remember to Smile"—follow the story of Pam Stone and her new horse.
- ▶ U.S. Olympian Adrienne Lyle—check out news and tips from this top Grand Prix competitor.

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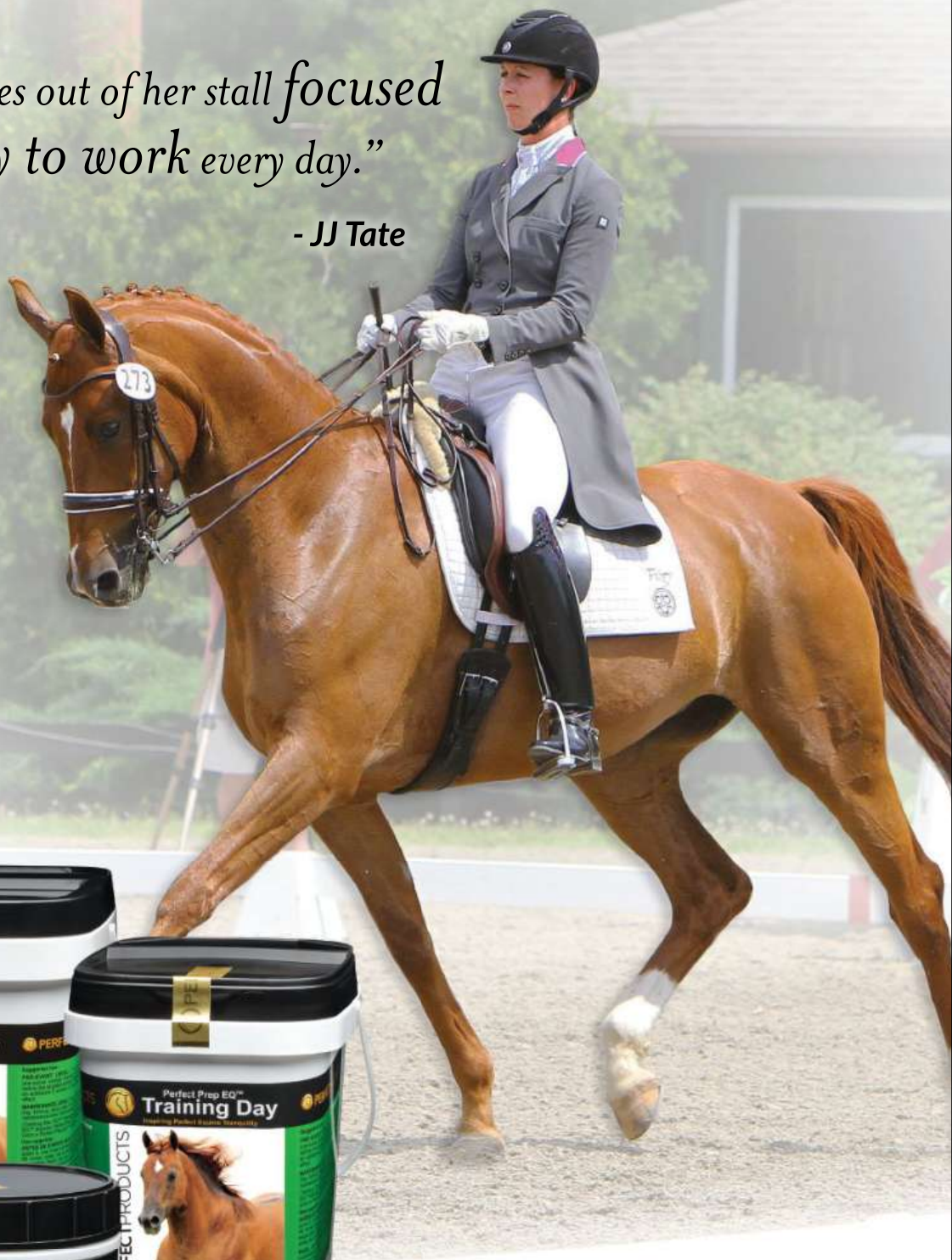
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## inside dt

## Beyond the Barn

**W**hen I was in school I opted out of many extracurricular activities to spend time at the barn. This time at the farm and in the saddle was my only form of exercise and for years it was enough. But as I grew older, entered a full-time job, got married and had children, I found that my level of riding wasn't enough to keep me fit and my riding position was suffering. I needed to look beyond my time in the saddle and adopt other forms of exercise. Today I enjoy walking 15 to 20 miles a week and have started light weight training—both of which have helped me stay healthy and improved my position.

Going beyond the barn to exercise or enjoy other hobbies can be a foreign

concept to many horsepeople. But in this month's special flip issue we explore that notion with international dressage competitor Shannon Peters and her husband, Steffen, U.S. dressage Olympian and 2015 Pan American Games double-gold winner. First we hear from Shannon on the importance of position and the benefits of having correct posture as a way of life. "Many of my students work at desk jobs or drive long distances to get to the barn and it affects their position on the horse. Awareness of proper spinal alignment throughout the day is so important."



Shannon offers four exercises to help improve your position and also recommends Pilates or yoga to help strengthen the core. Read "Position 101" on p. 28.

While we're on the topic of position, don't miss this month's "Tips From Trainers Who Teach," in which FEI-level rider Volker Brommann says, "If you ride well, your horsemanship and your basics are correct and the test is accurate, then you're going to be rewarded and be competitive." Read more on p. 36.

As I mentioned, this is a special issue. In fact, this will be our third flip book and perhaps my favorite since it features one of our sport's most beloved couples. In "At Home in San Diego with Shannon and Steffen Peters," this dynamic dressage duo opens their home to *Dressage Today*, giving us a look into how they spend their time at Arroyo Del Mar, their California-based home and training business. From training and teaching to baking, biking and "flying," this unique couple shows how they stay grounded amid a whirlwind of high-performance competition. You can read more about the Peters on p. F2.

Finally, we have two exciting opportunities for you this month. First is our Outfit My Ride contest (p. 16), which gives you a chance to win new tack and apparel. You also have a chance to win a cross-training clinic with two of equestrian sport's most well-known riders—U.S. eventing Olympian Boyd Martin and his wife, Silva, a renowned Grand Prix dressage rider and instructor (p. 50). Be sure to enter both!

Until next time,

Jennifer Mellace, Editor  
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## Dressage Abbreviations

A guide to the most commonly used abbreviations in *Dressage Today*:

FEI	Fédération Equestre Internationale
GMO	Group Member Organization
USDF	United States Dressage Federation
USEF	United States Equestrian Federation

## CHECK IT OUT!

Be sure to explore some of the exciting opportunities *Dressage Today* has in store for readers! Turn to p.16 to learn how you can enter our one-of-a-kind "Outfit My Ride" contest, which will provide one lucky reader and his or her horse with new gear—including the recently released PDS Carl Hester Grande dressage saddle.

If you've ever dreamed of riding with renowned Grand Prix dressage rider Silva Martin and her husband, top U.S. eventer Boyd Martin, be sure to enter our "Win a Day with Boyd & Silva Martin" contest that is hosted in partnership with our sister magazine, *Practical Horseman*. The winner will receive a clinic for himself or herself and up to nine friends. For more information about the contest, turn to p. 50.



## Pam'sBlog

### Remember to Smile

Pretty much any trainer will tell you that riding countless transitions is THE secret to helping improve impulsion, strength and balance. And for Forrest, an ex-race horse whose biggest challenge is adapting to a completely different balance beneath his rider (as this rider doesn't hike her stirrups up to her armpits and lean over his neck), it's particularly true. But I think what perhaps isn't addressed enough when this advice is given is, "But the transitions must be ridden correctly." Or at least as correctly as you can. Look, I'm a no-name trainer who has never ridden on a team, and, believe me, I make mistakes in my riding like everybody else. But I strive to correct them as quickly as I can so it doesn't happen again, and this is imperative when it comes to riding transitions. Why? Because nothing teaches a horse to perform crappy transitions more than riding crappy transitions. Like everything else in dressage, prerequisites are everything. 🐾

Follow more of Pam's "Remember to Smile" blog at [dressagetoday.com](http://dressagetoday.com).



Eric Olsen

## DRESSAGE TWEET OF THE MONTH

“It's our job to work with our conformation and that of our horses to find our core strength and balance in the saddle and to maintain it every single time we ride.”

— Shannon Peters

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For complete details and to submit your essay and high-resolution photo, visit [dressagetoday.com/outfit-my-ride](http://dressagetoday.com/outfit-my-ride). Your entry can also be submitted by mail to *Dressage Today/Outfit My Ride* Contest, 656 Quince Orchard Road, Suite 600, Gaithersburg, MD 20878. All entries are due no later than November 30, 2015. Winners will be announced by December 17, 2015.

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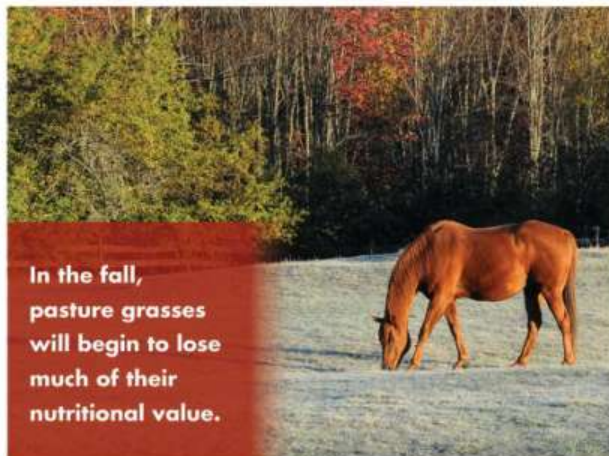
*By Katie Young, PhD*

**A**s we head into changing weather conditions in the fall and then the occasionally harsh months of winter, some adjustments must be made to ensure your dressage horse stays healthy and comfortable.

As cold weather approaches, there are some special considerations if horses have access to pastures. In certain situations, such as the warm, sunny days and chilly nights of fall, plants may store higher levels of sugars as polysaccharides, including starch and fructans, which can be problematic for some horses. This means that horses with sensitivities to soluble carbohydrates may need to have their access to pasture grasses restricted or removed entirely. Through the fall months in most regions, the pasture grasses will begin to go dormant and the vegetative portions of the plants will lose much of their nutritional value. Dry, brown grass is less digestible for horses and provides fewer calories, less protein and will lose some vitamin content. At some point it is likely you will need to provide hay to replace the pasture in your horse's diet.

Hay, which contains a higher level of fiber than grains, provides more of a warming effect internally, because greater heat is released during the digestion of fiber than of starch from grain. Horses need at least 1 percent of their body weight per day in roughage (on a dry-matter basis) to maintain a healthy digestive tract, but 2 percent or more may be appropriate during cold weather, especially if the horse lives outdoors.

Many horse owners believe that when the weather is cold, horses need to be fed rations containing more corn, because they think of corn as a heating feed. However, corn and other cereal grains do not cause the horse to become warmer; they simply provide more calories. Although grain does not provide as much of an internal warming effect as hay, it is often necessary to supplement a horse's winter ration with additional feed to boost calorie demands. Cold temperatures increase the number of calories a horse needs to maintain body weight and support athletic activity. It is also im-



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portant to maintain your horse at an appropriate body condition score (5 to 6, or moderate to moderately fleshy), because a layer of fat under the skin provides insulation against the cold.

In general, feeding an additional quarter pound of grain per 100 pounds of body weight to nonworking horses will provide adequate calories during cold, windy and wet weather. Hard-working upper-level dressage horses may require up to an additional half pound of feed per 100 pounds of body weight, depending on the intensity of their workload.

Bear in mind that while straight grains are good sources of calories, corn, oats and barley do not provide adequate balanced amino acids, minerals and vitamins to meet your dressage horse's nutritional needs. Choose a well-balanced feed that is fortified with essential nutrients as well as proper calories to meet your horse's requirements.

Careful monitoring, simple planning and attention to changing weather conditions will help your dressage horse stay healthy and comfortable all winter long. 🐾

**Katie Young, PhD**, is the lead technical equine nutritionist with Purina Animal Nutrition. Her responsibilities include formulation of branded horse feeds, support of Purina equine research and development projects and technical support for customers and dealers. She works closely with plant-quality assurance and manages all in-bound horse-owner inquiries from customer service. She received her PhD in equine nutrition from Texas A&M University. In her free time, she enjoys her four horses, gives riding lessons and competes in dressage and eventing.

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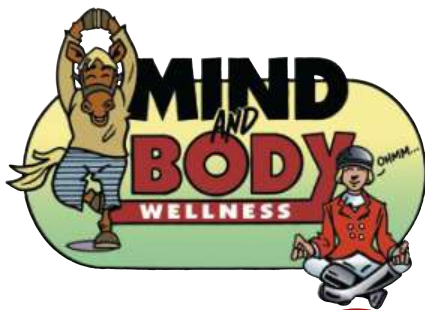
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PRE-SHOW ROUTINES:

# HOW TO SHOW LIKE A PRO PART I: PREPARATION

By Jenny Susser, PhD

Imagine this: You are having a great warm-up. Your horse feels supple and relaxed. You are focused and confident. Your thoughts are completely directed at your job, which is warming up and having a great test, just like the ones you do at home. You are connected and in a groove. You think, *This is going to be great!* Then the rider ahead of you goes in the ring, and the steward yells to you that you are on deck. Panic begins to set in. You screech to a halt, and in a flurry, your trainer/groom/husband/friend all rush to take off the wraps and boots and wipe your horse down. You try to shove your sweaty arms into your jacket, you spill water down your front as your hands shake the bottle to your dry mouth, you immediately feel the need to read your test because your mind has already gone blank and the constant barrage of inspiring and positive affirmations from your trainer sounds like Charlie Brown's teacher. Meanwhile, your horse thinks he's done because *This is what happens at the end of a ride, right? My boots and wraps come off, people chat around me and I get to stand here and relax.* He even cocks a hind leg in post-ride relaxation. The rider ahead of you finishes and you head toward the ring. Your mind is disconnected and doesn't know where to focus, and your horse is asking "What just happened?" Five minutes ago you were killing it! Now you feel like dying. What happened?

While this is a rather dramatic account of the on-deck period of time, I see this over and over again. This flow of actions is not a winning recipe and does not set up you or your horse for success. Yet, we do it over and over and don't realize the countless moments where we have the opportunity to make small adjustments to gain power and energy. You may have a good on-deck strategy, but you might be losing power elsewhere. The key is to find those places in your training or competing and develop a plan to improve them.

First of all, in the words of the wise Lendon Gray: "Know your test!" This should be a no-brainer but often isn't. It will give you something to always focus on and is vital in your preparation. Having a reader is a distraction—how many of you have seen someone go off course even with a reader?

Next, stop to remove wraps/boots/headsets *two* rides before your test. That way, you can take your relaxed horse back into the warm-up ring to reconnect both of you to the physical and mental state you so successfully achieved prior to the interruption. Years ago, I saw the most beautiful entry to a show ring ever. I remember being entranced by the pair's warm-up and the beautiful flow of energy between a rider and her lovely gray horse. They were showing at FEI level because she was in a shadbelly and her tails were flowing in the slight breeze in an almost magical rhythm. She was there alone so had no cause to stop and remove gear and interrupt her warm-up. It was like one long, connected movement. Each part of her warm-up flowed into the next, which ultimately flowed into a beautiful passage right into circling the ring. Her test was simply the denouement of all the actions and movements from the warm-up, and even though I have no idea what her score was, it was a win to me. What I loved



*Jenny Susser has a doctoral degree and is licensed in clinical health psychology, specializing in sport psychology. A four-year all-American swimmer at UCLA, she swam on two national teams and at the 1988 Olympic Trials. She has worked with athletes of all sports and ages—collegiate, professional, international and amateur. She was the sport psychologist for the 2010 WEG South African Para-Dressage Team and the 2012 U.S. Olympic Dressage Team. Dr. Jenny is also a performance coach with Human Performance.*



about this was the flow, the connection, the energy and the expression of obvious preparation. What I want you to trot away from this with is a quest to find what this might look like for you and your horse.

Finally, what do you want to *feel* like in the show ring? Sometimes, this is not an easy question to answer so it might take some work to define. Spend the time and energy on this because it will pay off in spades when you go into the ring knowing exactly the feel you are

looking for—and have found repeatedly in practice.

You need to *practice* like you want to *perform* one to two days per week. You will need time each week for you and your horse to learn and improve movements, but you also need to have time each week to practice how you want to perform. We have do-overs all the time in training but not in the competition ring, so simulate that same scenario in practice rides. Find ways to apply more

pressure at home so that you develop tools for dealing with it because guess what a horse show is full of—pressure!

There is more to prepare for than I can cover in a column, so this is where you can take this idea and go to work on it. Look at your weak spots for things to improve and look at your strengths for how to improve the weaknesses.

*Next month's column: Show Like A Pro, Part II: Falling in Love with Pressure.*

## RIDER FITNESS: BALANCE

By Rebecca Ashton • Photos by Norma Ashton

**G**ood rider balance is important for you to be in true harmony with your horse. Balance training allows you to better feel what your horse is doing under you and also better assess where you are in relation to your horse, which is also known as your proprioception. You want your body to correctly discern where you are in space compared to where you need to be and react accordingly. It not only will make you an easier load for your horse to carry and keep you safer in the saddle, but will mean that what you believe your body is doing really is exactly what your body is doing. For example, when you think your shoulders are aligned with your horse's shoulders, they really are.

The exercises we have covered in this column should already be helping with your balance, which involves not only your senses such as sight and touch, but also the feedback garnered from those deep stabilizing muscles we've been focusing on. Proper balance requires correct muscle usage that can react quickly to feedback—in our case, from the horse and how his body is moving. So I hope you've been practicing your reaction exercises!

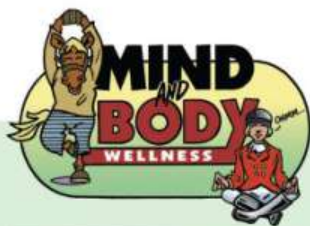
Balance can be hindered by injury or strain, which may disrupt the neural pathways and feed your brain incorrect information. Stiffness and body alignment also affect balance. Oh, to be a

child again! Balance comes so naturally to pliable, young bodies. As adults, we sometimes try to do things by force and strength rather than balance. When you ride, it's often helpful to ask yourself, *What is the least amount of muscle usage I need for the task at hand?* Sometimes you require more, sometimes less, depending on the horse you are riding or what you are doing—but always keep it to the minimum amount necessary.

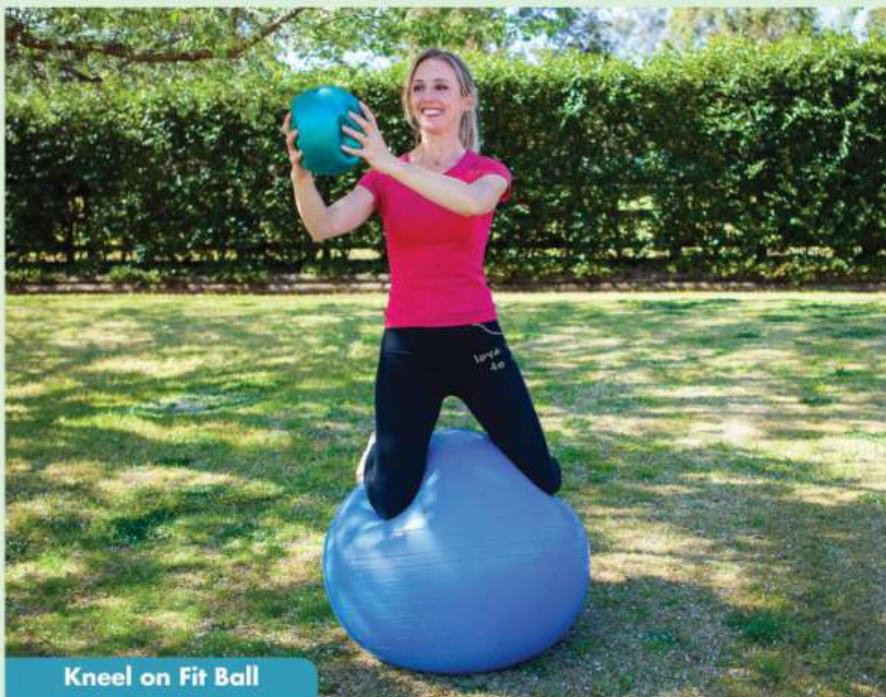


Balance Beam





Half Stability Ball



Kneel on Fit Ball

The best way to develop good balance on your horse is to take away your stirrups or get someone to longe you or do both at the same time. See if you can keep your balance centered in your seat bones and lower abdominals while you pat your horse's neck or reach around and pat his rump if he is trustworthy enough.

An easy way to work on balance off your horse is to grab a jump pole and use it as a balance beam. Be sure to anchor it securely before you jump on board. See if you can walk the length of the pole or alternate balancing on each leg. Feel that your balance point is in your navel and your limbs are relaxed. You can take this feeling into the saddle. The more you can balance in your seat bones and your lower abdominals while relaxing your limbs, the less you will grip. As this happens, your horse will become less tense. This also allows you to give an aid and leave your horse to it rather than lock on with your legs or hands. The less negative tension in your body, the better you can feel your

horse. Try not to overthink the process. You can also attempt this with your eyes closed.

Another fun exercise is to kneel on a big fit ball. Once you feel secure in this position, get a friend to throw a soft ball at you that you have to catch. When first attempting to kneel on a fit ball, do it on a soft surface in case the ball "bucks" you off. It also helps to deflate it a little. Be sure to re-inflate it, though, when you get the hang of it.

Try standing on a half stability ball (pictured) and build up to standing on

one foot and moving the opposite leg forward and back in a semicircle. Not only will your balance improve, but now you know what it must feel like for your horse to do a pirouette. Dressage requires that your horse be in good balance. Just think of the training required to balance on one hind leg when you are executing a canter pirouette and then put your other legs down in good rhythm and in suppleness while carrying a rider. If we require this sort of balance and precision from our horse, how can we not expect it of ourselves? 🐾



*Rebecca Ashton is a qualified Pilates instructor, a British Horse Society-trained instructor and an Equestrian Australia-accredited dressage coach. She has competed through Intermediaire II, working with riders such as Anky van Grunsven and earning championship titles in the small tour. She lives in Australia and teaches clinics internationally ([equestelite.com](http://equestelite.com)).*



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# Clinic • The •

## PHOTO CRITIQUES *by Susanne von Dietze*

*Susanne von Dietze is a leader in equestrian biomechanics. A physiotherapist, licensed Trainer A instructor and judge for dressage and show jumping, she gives lectures and seminars throughout the world, including at the prestigious German Riding Academy in Warendorf. She is a native of Germany and now lives with her husband and three children in Israel, where she competes at the international level. She is the author of two books on the biomechanics of riding: Balance in Movement and Horse and Rider, Back to Back. Find her books at [HorseBooksEtc.com](http://HorseBooksEtc.com).*



### Focus on Rhythm and Timing of the Aids

This picture shows Samantha Richards in a Training Level test on her 6-year-old Morgan mare, CBMF Stolen Kisses. This is only their second dressage show and the first recognized test they did together. Samantha has owned “Latte” since the mare was



**Samantha Richards rides her 6-year-old Morgan, CBMF Stolen Kisses, at Training Level.**

2 years old and has been bringing her along with the help of her coach and occasional clinics. She is currently working on improving suppleness and reducing her horse's tension, especially through her back. The judge at the show commented that she needs stronger influence with her seat.

Looking at the picture, one can see what a pretty and eager little horse Latte is. The only downside of this is that being overeager can look flashy but can lead to some unwanted tension, too. Here, she is showing a trot with a nice open stride. She is a little straight in her front legs and her neck is a bit high and short for Training Level.

I presume the picture was taken in rising trot, as Samantha is a little above the saddle. From the angle of this picture, I cannot 100 percent judge her balance line, but she looks upright and balanced. I mainly notice that she is bending more in her right wrist, as if she is taking more contact. If this is only for a short moment, that is OK, but if her hand stays bent like this continuously, it can lead to more tension for both Latte and Samantha.

The comment that she should use her seat more strongly is a statement that is often misunderstood. Riding instructions often contain completely opposite advice and yet it should mean the same. For example: Bend the horse to the inside but use the outside rein; sit deep but light; ride collected but forward and so on.

Often advice that is said with the right intentions can still be misunderstood. Looking at the picture, I do not feel that Samantha and Latte's harmony would improve by a “stronger” seat, but I do agree that Samantha needs to control Latte more with her seat and less with her hands or legs. Achieving this on such an eager horse is not always easy and needs some feel and experience.

It will be important and helpful for

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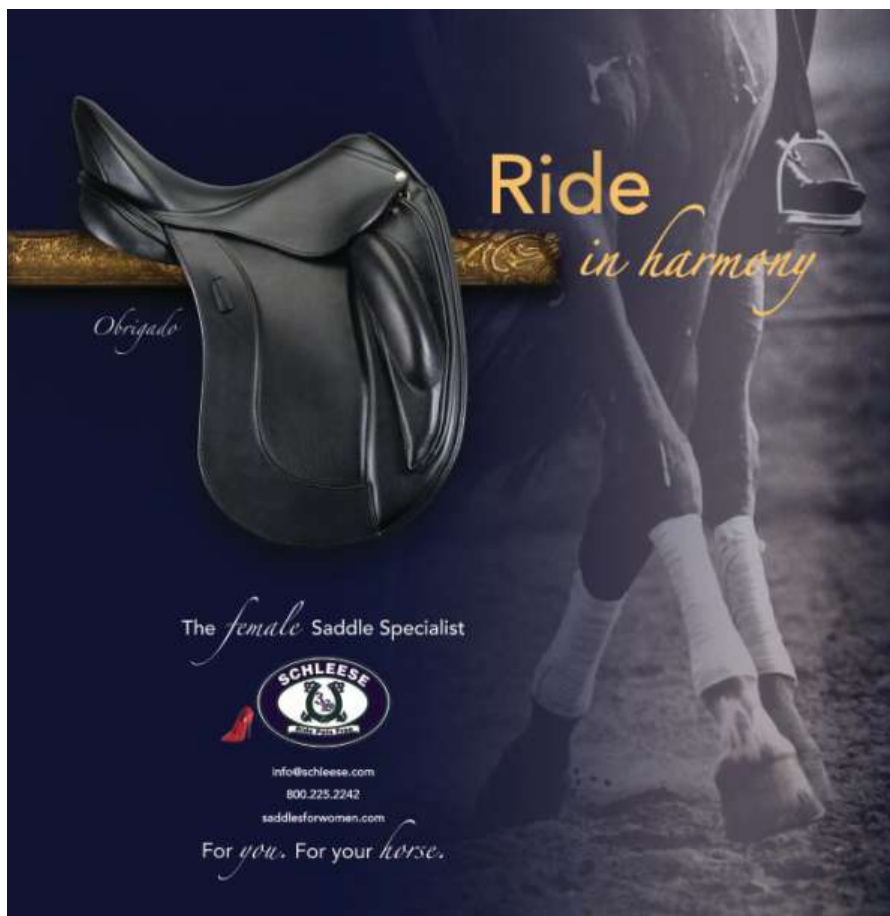
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Samantha to clearly connect with her horse's rhythm. This will help her find her balance point and influence Latte using her balance. Samantha will also learn to use the interplay of her aids with correct timing and rhythm.

To connect better with the horse's rhythm, **try this:** ride in the jumping seat, posting the trot by standing in the stirrups all the time. In this forward position, the rider needs to feel the exact moment when the horse's hooves touch the ground. This requires some activity on behalf of the rider to make sure her own weight is not passive but, instead, part of the horse's rhythm. The rising trot also needs to be exactly in this rhythm, with the timing of the rider's landing in the saddle synchronized with the horse's movement.

Looking at the picture close up, I notice that Latte's hind leg seems to land before Samantha's seat. This tiny timing difference can have a big influence on the horse's balance and ability to stay supple in her back. In rising trot, concentrating on the beat of the landing while rising slower and less high can be very effective on the horse. For Samantha to understand how she can use her seat more correctly, especially in transitions, she should clarify her understanding of the aids. The interplay of the aids, also known as the circle of aids, requires that we always need a bit of each aid, but never all at the same time. The importance of the aids is first the seat, then the leg and lastly, the hands. However, this isn't always the order that we need to use them in.

For example, balancing the horse means finding the frame between forward-driving and controlling aids and inside and outside aids. You must surround the horse with your aids from all sides. But if all aids come on at the same time, the horse cannot



move or understand what to do. Therefore, a rhythmic interplay of the aids is the most important. To feel this interplay, **try this:** in rising trot, concentrate for one beat on the horse's hind legs. Notice and feel the activity and impulsion. During the next beat, you want to feel your own balance in your seat, which is where the impulsion and energy of the horse should be directed. Then you can focus on the quality and lightness of the contact. In the next stride, focus back on your own balance and then on your horse's hind legs again. Your brain should be constantly thinking in this cycle: hind leg, balance, contact, balance, active, balance, lightness, balance. Feeling which aid the horse needs next is important for good riding. We do call them "aids" and not "forces" for a reason—the rider should help the horse to move in better balance under the saddle by use of the aids.

Concentrating on clear timing of her rhythm and balancing her aids inside this rhythm will help Samantha achieve a better connection and an ability to let all her aids go through her own seat. Then she can influence Latte with lighter aids. This helps for more suppleness and thoroughness of the movement.

I wish her success in the further training of this beautiful mare. 📷

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# Position 101



Become a more effective rider by finding and keeping your balance in the saddle.

By Shannon Peters with Kelly Sanchez

**I**n dressage, rider position and balance affect everything—the horse's rhythm and tempo, his longitudinal and lateral balance and his willingness to go forward and come back. Being balanced in the saddle will also make your aids more clear to your horse. But as anyone who rides knows, finding and keeping your balance on a living, breathing, moving animal is an enormous challenge. Some people compensate by hanging on to the reins or gripping with their legs or tightening with their back. The result? The horse is heavy; he won't go forward or he won't bend.

It's our job to work with our conformation and that of our horses to find our core strength and balance in the saddle and maintain them every single time we ride. Just watch riders like my husband, Steffen, or Guenter Seidel, Helen Langehanenberg or Ingrid Klimke: Their bodies seem to match their horses' movements exactly; the two of them move as a unit, as if their core structures are working together. That should be the goal for all of us. Try the following exercises and keep the ideas I share in mind every time you get on your horse. As you work to develop a stronger core, you may have to pause frequently in the beginning to reassess and readjust your position and balance.

## The Dressage Seat

For almost as long as I've been riding, I've focused on my posture and balance. I'm a small person and these days, I ride some big horses. So I have a checklist that I go through with each horse I ride. If my horse starts to get a bit heavy or gets behind my leg, I always go back to finding my position in the saddle. I ask myself, *How could I sit better to help my horse's balance?*

Before I get to my checklist, let's briefly look at the dressage seat. In classical terms, the dressage seat is formed by the two seat bones and the pubic bone. Together they form a triangle and a base of support for the rider in the saddle. The rider's ability to engage the appropriate core muscles helps stabilize this base and allows the hips to move elastically with the horse's back muscles.

My checklist is as follows: Is my base





Rider position and balance affect everything—the horse's rhythm and tempo, his longitudinal and lateral balance and his willingness to go forward and come back. It's our job to work with our conformation and that of our horses to find our core strength and balance in the saddle and to maintain them every single time we ride. Shannon Peters rides Weltino's Magic, a Westphalian gelding owned by Jen and Bruce Hlavacek.

LA Horstman Photography

of support correct or have I collapsed forward or back? Are my lower abdominal muscles engaged enough to maintain the three-point contact? Do I feel a good connection in my second group of muscles that stabilize my base, which is from my belly button to the sternum? Is my sternum elevated softly so that my chest is open and my shoulders are softly back and down, connecting my elbows down to my hips, extending to soft lower arms?

To become more effective riders, we have to look at the parts of our bodies that don't move in harmony with the horse. Some of us have tight legs; others have tight lower backs, braced hips or rigid arms. All these issues inhibit the horse's ability to move freely. I have a longer waist, so maintaining a neutral spine and not allowing my back to hollow when my horse loses his balance and comes against the contact is a chal-

lenge that I continually work on.

### **Exercise 1: Loosen Your Hips, Legs And Lower Back**

Every day when I get on my first horse, I do an exercise that I also encourage my students to do. Most of us get in the saddle, put our feet in the stirrups and off we go to ride, not taking the time to recognize tension in the hips, legs and lower back. Try this to loosen those areas:



1. Sit in the saddle and drop your stirrups.
2. Draw your legs up and over the top of each side of your saddle, close to the pommel. From there, grab the pommel with one hand and the cantle with the other and pull your hips as close to the pommel as you can.



Photos by Rebecca Neff

3. Let your legs drop back down against your horse's sides. You will feel a big stretch in your hip flexors, psoas (the muscles that connect your lower back to the top of the thighs) and inner thigh muscles and, quite possibly, a lot of tightness the first few times you do it.
4. Continue to feel your legs stretching down and try to find the three points of contact in your seat as you walk on a loose rein around the arena for 15 minutes.



Go through your own personal checklist for the first few minutes to find your center of balance and connect your postural muscles. Once you have done this, you'll start to feel how your horse is moving on any given day. Is there a lack of swing through his rib cage or is he swinging more in one direction than the other? Do you feel tightness in your horse's hips or shoulders? A good walk around the arena on a loose rein with your feet out of the stirrups will show you so much before you even pick up the reins. This will help you formulate a plan for your warm-up to improve the suppleness of those areas you feel need attention that day. You'll discover what you need to work on to balance your horse before you start working on more advanced exercises.

### Engaging Your Core

Keeping your pelvis in balance in the saddle requires that you engage your core muscles, but for every rider that's a very different feeling to attain because everyone has a different conformation and body type. When I walk off on my horses for a training session, I think about three areas:

1. My lower core muscles from my pubic bone to my belly button, which stabilize and allow my lower back to relax and absorb the horse's movement and keep my pelvis engaged toward the pommel.
2. My middle core muscles between my belly button and sternum, which stabilize the midsection.
3. My sternum upward through the top of my head.

By maintaining good posture and alignment of these areas, you increase your effectiveness in the saddle as well as your ability to use independent, balanced aids.

The higher you move up the levels, the more core stability you need, but being able to separate the parts takes awareness. For instance, your legs and arms will try to balance what your core doesn't balance. So when a rider has a core instability somewhere—it can be in the pelvis, the midsection, the upper chest or the upper





back—it always affects what her arms and legs do. Once you have a strong base of support, your legs and arms can independently give an aid without your body pitching forward or back.

In her book *Centered Riding*, Sally Swift talks about the building blocks of an effective position. Being able to isolate the muscles in your lower and middle abdominals is key to maintaining proper alignment, as does being able to open your chest muscles and contract those of your upper back. Working toward balance and symmetry in these muscle groups leads to a rider who can use independent aids from supple hips and legs as well as soft rein aids from a balanced upper body.

## Exercise 2: Engage Your Core

So what does it mean to engage your core? Every rider needs to find his or her deep core muscles without leaning back or bracing. Starting at the walk, try this exercise to attain the feeling of engaged abdominals and a neutral lower spine:

1. Find your neutral lower spine in the saddle by starting with the first exercise (p. 29-30) to loosen your hips, legs and lower back.
2. Engage your lower abdominals to feel as though there is a bungee cord pulling your hips toward the pommel, maintaining the feeling you just created with the leg exercise.
3. Without bracing, maintain that positive tension of the bungee cord in your lower abdominals. Then engage and lengthen your abdominals from your belly button to your sternum. I find this to be one of the more difficult things for most riders to do. You should feel like you are balancing your body toward your horse's ears to create the feeling of going with his movement.
4. You should feel as if you could easily lift both legs off the sides of your horse while maintaining the correct abdominal posture.
5. This proper alignment of pelvis and spine should also create a rider that

doesn't clench her buttock muscles or grip with her legs or arms for balance.

## Improving Your Leg

For riders who need to improve their lower leg position, I first check to see that their seat and balance are correct. This is generally where a loss of position in the lower leg starts: Some riders grip with their knees or sit with their upper body too far back, which sends their legs and feet too far forward to counterbalance. But riders must pay attention to their leg position as well. Maintaining a good ear-hip-heel alignment is what you are aiming for.

## Exercise 3: Improve Your Leg Position

Riding with the backs of your legs or hamstrings helps to align your thigh downward. This exercise accomplishes a couple of things: It engages your hamstrings and it helps to lengthen your inner thigh muscles down to the knee. Here's how to improve your leg position:



**Riding with the backs of your legs or hamstrings helps to align your thigh downward. This exercise accomplishes a couple of things: It engages your hamstrings and it helps to lengthen your inner thigh muscles down to the knee.**

Rebecca Neff

1. While sitting in the saddle, imagine there is a large, soft tennis ball behind each of your knees. Lightly flex your hamstring muscle in the back of each leg so as to hold your imaginary tennis balls in place. Try to maintain the feeling of keeping the tennis balls behind your knees for your entire ride.
2. Stretch your heels down, without bracing or creating tension, maintaining a nice elastic feel down the leg.
3. If you find yourself losing your stirrups, you might need to shorten your leathers until you can achieve more supple hip, knee and ankle joints.

### **Becoming a More Effective Rider**

When I look at a horse and rider, I look at how they move together. Does some part of the rider look disconnected or imbalanced or does she interfere with the horse in some way? Is she sitting on her seat bones, and does the middle of her body stack above her hips? How do her legs drape around her horse? What about her head position? I like to see a cohesiveness in the movements, that the joints in the horse's body look like they're working together with the joints in the rider's body. Horse-and-rider combinations usually reflect one another's dysfunction, so a horse with a tight back often has a rider with a tight back and/or hips. Or a horse that is pulling usu-

## *Finding My Dressage Seat*

*By Shannon Peters*

*I* grew up riding Arabians in saddle seat, which meant my feet were up close to the horse's shoulders and my back was hollow. When I switched to dressage at about 19, it was quite a challenge to change the way I sat in the saddle and change the muscles I used to ride in proper alignment, ear to hip to heel. Part of how I learned was from experience on a long line. Riding without stirrups and reins is the single best way to accomplish finding your center of balance in the saddle. Of course, this requires a good longe horse and an instructor to help you with biomechanics.

I've had some wonderful teachers along the way. My first

dressage instructor, "S" judge Debbie Riehl-Rodriguez, taught me so much about basic balance in the saddle and about being an effective rider. Nancy Baker gave me ideas that I use to this day with my riders and myself. My greatest influence has been Karl Mikolka, the former chief rider of the Spanish Riding School, with whom I have ridden for 18 years. He is so adamant about the smallest details, like the thumbs and the elbows and that how you sit in the saddle can enable you to be an effective trainer. I am also fortunate to have my wonderful husband's watchful eye every day.

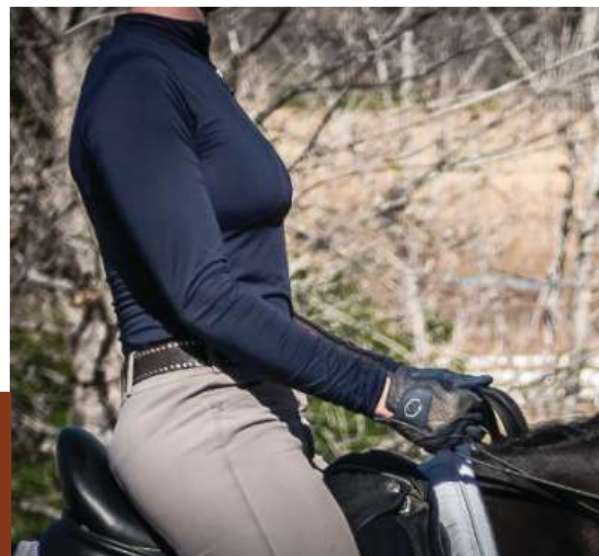
With my own students, I always try to keep things as simple as possible. We might work on one or two things per lesson that they can accomplish before moving on. That way, they always have tools when they're riding by themselves or when they're having difficulties with their horse.





Photos by Rebecca Neff

**With correct upper-body posture—chest open, shoulders down, into heavy elbows—make sure you’re holding your reins completely and not grasping them with the tips of your fingers. Firmly, but without tension, close all four fingers and turn your hand upright with your thumb on top. Close your thumb flat down on the side of your index finger. To maintain the proper feeling in your hand, your thumb should feel firmest of all.**



to communicate her aids clearly to the horse. And it’s the rider’s responsibility to know how much of an aid she is using and what the response is from the horse.

ally correlates to a lack of balance in the rider or the combination of horse/rider.

If a rider has a good seat, a good leg position and an engaged core, that rider is more likely to be effective. Riders sometimes try to find their balance by squeezing their legs or driving with their seat instead of allowing the horse to come up to them. You create expression, balance and suppleness in your horse

through your good position and by not losing your place of balance in the saddle even if your horse loses his.

Your horse will always follow your weight. So if you’re sitting out of balance—for example, heavier on one seat bone or collapsed through your hip—the horse will generally follow your weight, no matter what your leg or hand may be telling him to do. It’s the job of the rider

### **Create an Elastic Feel**

Our goal as riders is to create a place in the contact that you want your horse to come to without tension. Once you’ve begun to establish a secure, independent seat, you can start to develop a soft, supple contact.

### **Exercise 4: Develop a Soft, Supple Contact**

1. With correct upper-body posture—

chest open, shoulders down, into heavy elbows—make sure you're holding your reins completely and not grasping them with the tips of your fingers.

2. Firmly, but without tension, close all four fingers and turn your hand upright with your thumb on top.
3. Now the important part: Close each thumb flat down on the side of your

index finger. To maintain the proper feeling in your hand, your thumb should feel firmest of all.

4. Develop a good connection in the rising trot. Each time you touch down in the saddle, think of dropping your shoulders into your elbows (with an elevated chest and sternum) and giving your thumb a squeeze to help create the correct feeling to your horse's mouth.

This exercise should be subtle enough that no one sees it, but you'll be surprised at how establishing this correct arm/hip position in the beginning can really influence the rest of your ride, because it allows your wrist to softly communicate with the horse's mouth.

Only when we have established an independent, supple seat with the appropriate postural muscles to maintain our balance can we start to truly achieve an elastic connection with our horse.

## Correct Posture as a Way of Life

Many of my students work at desk jobs or drive long distances to get to the barn and it affects their position on the horse: Their heads might be a bit forward or their

core is collapsed and their shoulders rounded. It's very difficult to sit correctly in the saddle if you've been sitting for a long time in front of a computer or behind the wheel.

Awareness of proper spinal alignment throughout the day is so important. It will help train the muscles you need in the saddle.

Strength training, Pilates, stretching and many other activities are absolutely beneficial to balance muscles that you over- or underuse when riding. Your core muscles can be strengthened outside of the saddle, but be mindful that you strengthen them in the saddle as well. Keeping a healthy balance of work in and out of the saddle will give you many years of comfortable, fun and effective riding and alleviate a lot of structural issues for you and your horse. 📖

## TIPS:

- Create a checklist at the beginning of each ride
- Loosen your hips, legs and lower back at the start of your ride
- Be aware of your posture throughout the day



Rebecca Neff



**Shannon (standing) with her student Ehren Volk aboard Vaya Con Dios.**

**Shannon Peters** is a popular clinician and teacher as well as coach to her husband, three-time dressage Olympian Steffen Peters.

Shannon began riding and competing in Western and saddle seat in her native Michigan. College took her to Boulder, Colorado, where she developed a successful dressage training business before moving to San Diego in 2002. After Shannon married Steffen in 2004, the pair started SPeters Dressage in San Diego. A USDF bronze, silver and gold medalist, Shannon is a three-time national championship competitor: on Luxor in 2007 when the two were crowned Reserve National Champions Intermediaire I; on Flor de Selva in 2009 when they took home fourth place in the Intermediaire division; and on Akiko Yamazaki's Odyssey in 2011 after winning the Grand Prix Special at the Del Mar and Burbank CDIs in California. With Jen and Bruce Hlavacek's Westphalian gelding, Weltino's Magic, Shannon won Reserve National Champion in the 6-year-old division at the 2008 Markel/USEF Young Horse Championships, and Steffen won team and individual gold medals at the 2011 Pan Am Games in Guadalajara, Mexico. Shannon and "Magic" are currently competing at Grand Prix. *Special thanks to Shannon's student Ehren Volk riding Vaya Con Dios and to Dawn White-O'Connor riding Aristo for participating in the photo shoot.*



**Steffen Peters**

Olympic Dressage Rider  
and Trainer

Serious Horseman

SUCCEED User

**Shannon Peters**

Dressage Rider, Clinician  
and Teacher

Serious Horsewoman

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# PHILOSOPHIES FROM VOLKER

By Volker Brommann  
with Beth Baumert

Photos by Beth Baumert

**S**tay dedicated to the quality of the basic gaits—the suppleness and balance of the walk, trot and canter. Then as you cultivate the movements, those gaits improve. Here's what to look for every day:

In the **walk**, you want a combination of purpose and calmness. Do not sightsee in the walk. Rather, you want to try to “catch the next bus without running.”

In both the **trot** and **canter**, you want to feel that your horse is taking you along into the next stride because he is in front of the leg, his back swings and he's balanced.

In all three gaits, the keys are rhythm, suppleness and a readiness for the horse to answer the next aid or request immediately.

**Teaching horses is like making a rum cake.** When you make a rum cake, you need time to let the rum soak in. It's the same when teaching a horse because he can only learn so fast. If the rider is inclined to teach too fast and drill the same thing again and again, the horse's muscles get tired. Teaching a skill is a matter of using a timeline. If I teach a skill this week, I don't expect it to be perfect next week. I allow the horse to absorb the lesson.

For example, in teaching your horse the aids for left bend, part of the signal is to bring your right leg back. If the horse doesn't respond, I don't keep bugging him about it. If he doesn't bend after five times, what are my chances of getting it after 15 times? I leave it alone or find a different approach so I don't make the horse dull. Ask your horse, but don't drill him. Give him time for the lesson to soak in and try again tomorrow.

**Use clear aids.** Some riders inadvertently give three different signals for the horse to do the same thing. How many hand signals do you give when you want your dog to sit? One. To use the same left bending example, if my horse doesn't respond to my normal outside leg aid and I kick him, then I've used a different aid. That's a special aid used to get the horse's attention. Then I return to the exact same normal signal with clear aids, and my horse understands more easily. Only use the special aid to make him more alert.

**Reward your horse when the work is hard.** When you ask your horse for extra effort and he tries hard, be sure to reward him at that moment. I don't mean hug him and give him sugar. I mean let the horse know how good he is when he's trying hard.

When I rode with Walter Christensen and Klaus Balkenhol, they worked me hard. I remember thinking, *Oh, my God, I think my legs are going to fall off.* But then when I heard, “Good! Great! There you go!” the pain went away. They cheered for me.

The horse needs to feel that we cheer for him when he tries hard. Yesterday I asked a horse for two or three short trot steps, the beginning of piaffe. He did it, and I made a big deal about it. I asked for the same thing today, and he did it more by himself.

**You can't force a horse to move like a 10.** Horses move best if you explain what you want and don't force it. If your horse isn't a big mover, he just needs to understand his job. Sometimes riders work too hard to get that big result, pushing the horse past his rhythm and tempo. You'll get positive feedback when the work looks easy. Avoid making the common mistake of racing around in the name of forwardness.



**Annie Morris rides her own 8-year-old PRE gelding, Icaro.**

**VOLKER BROMMANN** became a licensed *Bereiter* in 1980 in his native Germany and earned his *Pferdewirtschaftsmeister* in 1988. He was one of the first USDF Certified Instructors at the FEI level in the U.S. He and Jennette Scanlon live with their sons, Dylan and Mattias, in Auburn, California. Brommann is in demand as a clinician throughout the U.S. (volkerbrommann.com).





**EXERCISE 2, STEP 2**

**Annie rides Icaro in medium canter.**



**EXERCISE 2, STEP 3**

**Annie shortens and activates Icaro's stride.**

**Think positively toward your horse.** Your horse feels your positive attitude toward him. Don't plan on anything going wrong and if your horse makes a mistake, don't consider it something wrong. The horse just didn't quite understand yet.

**Nerves are OK.** If you never get nervous, there's something wrong. You might not care enough. You need a little nervousness that will turn into either success or a learning experience. Nerves should enable us, not disable us.

**Stay focused on your game.** You can't change your golf swing the night before the big tournament. If you find yourself in the competition warm-up admiring a great rider on a beautiful horse floating along the ground, don't change your program. Stick to your game and do what your horse can do. When the curtain opens, you just need to say, "Look, this is what we can do today."

If you ride well, your horsemanship and your basics are correct and the test is accurate, then you're going to be rewarded and be competitive. 🏆

### **Try these Exercises to Develop a Sense of Readiness**

Your horse's positive reaction to light aids improves the balance and the quality of his gaits. That rhythmic eagerness gives him swing in the back and a positive, elastic tension in the rein. Tailor the following exercises to the lower-level horse by using working gaits and lengthenings. For the more educated horse use collected and medium paces.

#### **EXERCISE 1**

1. Begin by tracking right. Go from M to R in the medium walk.
2. At R, pick up working trot.
3. At P, transition to medium walk. Feel that you can make your down transition with forward aids rather than bring him back with too much hand.
4. At F, transition to working trot, riding energetically through the short side.
5. At K, do another forward-thinking transition to medium walk.

6. By now your horse is eagerly expecting to do transitions. As you approach V, your horse will expect to trot, but ride a transition to extended or free walk on the diagonal to change direction.
7. As you approach M tracking left, shorten your reins and go to a medium walk in a forward way.
8. Do the same exercise on a 20-meter circle. Do it with trot-canter-trot transitions. Through these simple transitions, you instill readiness in your horse.

#### **EXERCISE 2**

1. Start on a 20-meter circle in trot.
2. Lengthen the stride slightly for a half circle.
3. Shorten the stride and at the same time make the hind legs quicker with your leg or whip.
4. Lengthen the stride again for a half circle.
5. Repeat the shortening of the stride and at the same time make the hind legs quicker.

Your horse's movement becomes more

expressive because his hind legs carry him with uphill balance into the lengthenings and they take more weight during collection. Do the same exercise in canter. These simple exercises lead to a forward-thinking horse not only in upward transitions but also in down transitions. That forward-thinking quality improves the horse's balance as he becomes more aware of how to use his hind legs in all situations. He always has the desire to go actively into the next gait or transition.

# FASHION FORWARD

Elite-level riders discuss the future of freestyle competition attire and the presence of bling in the ring.

*Story and photos by Nancy Jaffer*

At the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, where the dressage freestyle made its ground-breaking Games debut, Robert Dover suggested to me that the competition dress code could be more relaxed, with a wider variety of styles and colors at the least and the innovations could become more daring as time went on. It sounded interesting to me, so I then dutifully trotted up to Reiner Klimke, perhaps the most eminent figure in the sport at that time, and asked him what he thought. The German, who wowed America with his brilliant gold-medal performances on Ahlerich in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, listened tight-lipped to what I had to say. Then he fixed me with a piercing look and said, sternly emphasizing each word, “This is NOT circus!”

Klimke died in 1999, before the word “bling” was in general circulation. I wonder what he would make of the current trend toward glitter. I think I know, though, how he would have responded to a few comments tossed around that perhaps costumes might be worn for rides to music in competition. His response wouldn’t be pretty, I feel quite sure of that.

Nearly two decades after my conversation with Klimke, things have loosened up considerably regarding dressage dress, especially for the freestyle under the

regular topic during meetings of the FEI Dressage Committee, when its members discuss the sport’s future.

As the FEI mulls over ways to make all its disciplines more up to date and popular—always with an eye toward keeping the sport in the Olympics—there is still a line being drawn with the word “tradition,” which continues to be cited when it comes to determining the rules on dress.

“I don’t know how far we’ll go,” mused Thomas Baur, of Germany, deputy chair of the committee. “I think some modernization will be on the way. I still don’t know what it will look like in the end. A lot of the stakeholders, like riders, trainers and organizers, agree that we want to go on the modern side. From my point of view, it is not really a need because we already have the possibility in the rules to use other colors [for tailcoats], and more or less nobody is using that. But others see the need, so I think it will come.”

He did add, “I’m a bit afraid of seeing an orange tailcoat in a championship,



# ON WARD



**Carl Hester sports slightly updated traditional dress with touches of color.**



**Red piping offers a neat outline on Shawna Harding's back.**

though there seems no danger of that in the immediate future. But a few more years on—who knows?" How far it will go is a matter to ponder.

British Olympic team gold medalist Carl Hester, the mentor of Charlotte Dujardin and one of Valegro's owners, sees several angles of the dress issue, having spent many years competing before the bling barrage. "I've lived on the other side of it," he said, when asked about his feelings on the loosening of the dress code. "I feel quite happy about the way that it's moving. I enjoy the tradition of it, understandably, as I know a lot of other people do. The only people who don't seem to want to look forward to the new image that I think is going to have to happen at some stage are probably those people who have never lived through the era of very traditional dress.

"I've managed to come through a transition, I feel, into slightly blingy," he continued, adding he doesn't, however, see himself in a place where he would utilize bling in excess.

Hester added, "I think it looks good. If we are talking about bringing new people into dressage and new spectators

into dressage, they will be, I think, more happy to see that than the old, stuffy image. For embracing new people, it's going to have to happen."

Canadian rider Jacqueline Brooks noted there is a real question about the way to modernize the sport while still maintaining some of its traditions. "That's a difficult balance," she said. "We should be allowed to express our individuality, but where is that line between a sport and a spectacle?" she wondered.

Brooks thinks blinged-out browbands look beautiful, but it is possible to take it too far. "When you are getting into reins, stirrup leathers and stirrups, then the tradition is lost," she said. On the other hand, she says, "wool tailcoats are so not up to speed with our sport. Some of the newest fabrics are amazing." Even so, Brooks feels that the tradition of the sport can be lost when riders take it too far.

Catherine Haddad Staller, however, seems to support a different mindset when discussing the international dressage community. "There's been a lot of talk about making the sport more appealing to spectators," she said. Haddad Staller herself favors a coat made from



**Red collar and cuffs look sharp on Great Britain's Number One in the world, Charlotte Dujardin.**

shiny material for her evening appearances. "When we stick with drab, very military-looking dress, it doesn't have a lot of appeal. I don't want to turn it into a costume class by any means, but I do think if you can add a bit of bling, especially if you're showing under lights at night, if you can add some crystals here and there, a sparkly material, a sparkle on a boot or a spur, I think it really livens things up. I'm not a person who wants somebody to go out there looking like the Rhinestone Cowboy at all, but I do think we have to loosen up our rules about dress, so we can make a more appealing picture out there."

Things have changed a great deal since the 2007 World Cup Final in Las Vegas, Nevada, when Haddad Staller requested permission to step slightly out of the norm and wear a brown shadbelly. The ground jury said no.

These days, different colors and patterns are dressing up tailcoats for freestyles and rhinestones are no longer strangers to the arena. There are, however, those who think they should be used judiciously.



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"If it promotes the beauty of the horse, then it's fine," said Dover, now the U.S. technical advisor and *chef d'équipe*. "If it takes away from the beauty of the animal and the gaits of the dancing that's going on, then it's not fine. That's in regard to what I believe we should be thinking of as a standard." Dover said that he thinks that the underlying question revolves around whether the attire promotes the beauty of the sport or detracts from it. "That's the key to the entire thing," he said. "I don't think it's a clear-cut answer."

"If it becomes extreme to the point where you can't even look at the horse because you're so busy looking at the plush velvet with the 15 different colors of the rider, then it's not to the advantage of the rider because the horse stops being the biggest part of the picture. If it enhances the overall beauty of the combination, then I think it's all good."

Dover's predecessor in the technical advisor's job, Anne Gribbons, who is also an international judge, had a similar sentiment. "Bling in small amounts and in the right places, I think, can enhance both the horse and the rider," she said. "When it's done in a classy way, a way that is not in your face, it's fine and it's fun," she continued. "There's a limit," she said, however. In Gribbons' opinion, too much sparkle on saddle pads, browbands and used in abundance on tailcoats is where she draws the line.

"When [bling] comes at you in all its glory and then the test isn't so good, it's almost a negative influence," she pointed out. "There's so much glitter and bling, and you expect great things, and if they don't happen, it's a little bit flattening. It could actually work against you if you're not careful," Gribbons warned. A change she would like to see in dress would be a sportier, more modern-type coat that she contends would go better with helmets than do the tails. She considers the pairing of tailcoats and helmets bizarre. "No designer in

**Red buttons and points make Steffen Peters' shadbelly look unique.**



the world would put that combination together," she said.

The more experienced riders understand the value of moderation that Gribbons emphasized and they include some conservative voices in the Grand-Prix ranks who just want to ramp up their clothing a little.

"I like that the sport is evolving," said Canadian Olympic medalist Ashley Holzer. "A little something special for a free-style at night is nice as long as it's age- and arena-appropriate. I like that people are having fun with the sport, but I'm not at the age where I want to come in with a lot of bling. These younger girls and guys that are coming out, they have a little more pizzazz on them."

Not everyone, of course, exercises the same discretion. "I totally agree with the FEI that we've got to put a limit on it," said Pan American Games double-gold medalist Steffen Peters.

As one of the minority in the U.S. still wearing a top hat instead of a helmet for major competitions, he noted,

"If it's too sparkly, too bright, that's not my personal taste."

Although Peters wears a helmet for warm-up and some national classes, he prefers a top hat for international competition as a number of top Europeans and U.S. riders still do, including Lisa Wilcox, Lars Petersen and Haddad Staller. World Number One Charlotte Dujardin always wears a helmet. When she did so among a sea of top hats when taking double gold at the 2012 Olympics, it was a matter for much comment.

At one point, Peters wore a forward-looking shadbelly with cross over fastening, but is now in a more traditional style with a sponsorship from Cavalleria Toscana. He did note that eventer Will Faudree asked him for his former shadbelly and is wearing it. "I'm very happy it's still being used," Peters said.

U.S.-based Danish rider Petersen has updated his look, but only slightly. "I'm a little old-fashioned. I have a coat now with little stripes in it. That's probably as far as I'll take it," he chuckled.



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**Shannon Peters (left) and David Blake did a freestyle as Poison Ivy and Batman in Las Vegas.**

"I don't want it to become circus too much," he said.

Pan American Games team gold medalist Kimberly Herslow has an edging of rhinestones on her boots, yet she doesn't go crazy with the shiny stuff. "As far as the bling, I like to keep it not overdone," she commented. "I like a little for myself, and Reno [Rosmarin] has his browband with the blue crystals. But generally, I like to keep it tasteful. I think it sometimes can be a bit overdone and too much just looks gaudy."

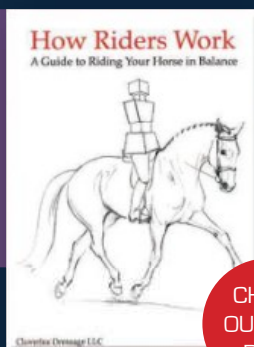
There are ways Herslow chooses to express herself without too much glimmer, she noted. "I have a new shadbelly that has points that you can change to make them conservative or a bit more fun and bright. I like to switch it up so it's not always the same. Still have to keep it classy, though," Herslow said.

Olympic medalist Wilcox agrees that

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bling can be nice, but says it is important to maintain a classical flair. "Be respectful to the sport," she said. "Bling looks great when it sparkles at night... [but] I don't think we need to go in the direction of the circus in the color of the coats." She prefers to put sparkle on her mounts rather than herself. "I like my boys to be the ones everyone's looking at, and I just disappear into the saddle."

There are, however, times when adding more than a touch of show business has its place in the big picture of attempting to popularize the discipline, even if that place is not in the competition arena.

Steward Elisabeth Williams recalled that costumed freestyles worked well as an exhibition during the World Cup Final in Las Vegas last spring. "I think it is good the more we can show the crowds that dressage can be fun while

we show them the beautiful horses and the beautiful movements. I think the crowd just loved it because there were a lot of people in there maybe who didn't know so much about dressage and think it's a boring thing to watch. Well, this is not boring. I don't know if we're ready for the competition freestyles to go quite this wild, but I'm not totally against the different colored coats, the different colored boots, the bling on helmets or whatever because I think we need to do something to keep the interest."

Asked whether he thought we will one day see costumes in the freestyle, Baur was as definite as Klimke had been. "I hope that never will happen," he stated firmly.

"We are a traditional sport and we should stick to our roots. We should not become members of the circus." 🐾



Photo © by Lawrence J. Nagy

**The shiny material of Catherine Haddad Staller's coat gleamed under the lights at the 2014 Central Park Horse Show.**



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# Riding in Gratitude

One rider brings light to a couple who generously supports the dressage dreams of others.

By Elise Elman

I would like to give credit where credit is due to Chuck and Joann Smith. They are the owners of Gypsy Woods Farm, in Richwood, Ohio, which is the home of Rocher and Marnix, two well-known horses who have competed in the highest level of dressage. Rocher, the Westphalen mare who competed internationally with George Williams, is now 24.

Together, Rocher and Williams received numerous awards at the Grand Prix level, including fifth place at the 2003 World Cup Dressage Freestyle Finals in Gothenburg, Sweden. Marnix, a Dutch Warmblood gelding, is 21 and a veteran at the Grand Prix level as well. Both Rocher and Marnix are still ridden—Rocher very lightly and Marnix a little bit more so. They are both happy and loved very much.

Besides taking such great care of these wonderful horses, Chuck and Joann have helped out many people within the dressage world, including trainers, businesses and riders from Training Level to Grand Prix. I speak from experience because they are currently allowing me to ride their horse Moncasin, or “Moca.” Last year, Joann suggested that I try for my bronze medal on Moca. Considering my prior experience, I thought it might have been a reach. In 2012, I had never shown above First Level. In 2013, I didn’t show at all and thought there was no way I would get my bronze in one show season in 2014. But with the Smith’s encouragement and undying confidence in my riding ability, we got it done.

This year I am trying for my silver medal, again with their enthusiastic encouragement. So far, I have gotten both Fourth Level scores and one Prix St. Georges score toward that goal. If it weren’t for Chuck and Joann’s generosity, I never would have come close to riding at this level. And even though jackets were waived at the show where I was competing at Prix St. Georges for the first time, there was no way I was riding without wearing my shadbelly!

Chuck and Joann seem to be enjoying my journey as much as I am. They are genuinely happy to see me succeed, and I appreciate this opportunity more than words can say. I’m certainly not the only recipient of the couple’s generosity, though. They allowed Katie Knoechel, a junior rider, to compete Marnix in 2014 and earlier this year. It was a win-win for all involved as Chuck and Joann were glad to see Marnix in the ring again. A bunch of us even drove to Lexington, Kentucky, to see the pair compete at the Adequan/FEI North American Junior/Young Rider Championships.

I, myself, have just begun riding Marnix as well and all I can say is “Wow!” Never in a million years did I ever think I would have the

opportunity to ride a Grand Prix horse and not look like a complete idiot.

In addition to riding Moca and Marnix, Chuck and Joann also allow me to love on Rocher, who we refer to as “The Queen.” I love interacting with her, whether it be grooming, bathing or hand-grazing her. She is one of the neatest horses I’ve ever come in contact with and I think she loves the attention as much as I love giving it to her.

I was asked to go to Dressage at Devon when Rocher retired in 2013, and it was an honor to be there. At the show, it became even more clear to me how respected Chuck and Joann are within the community and how loved Rocher is by the public.

Rocher’s legacy may also live on in her daughter, Gardez La Foi or “Rocket,” which is French for “keep the faith.” Rocket has been started under saddle, and Chuck and Joann are excited to see if she’ll be as spectacular as Rocher.

There are probably too many riders to count who have benefited from Chuck and Joann’s generosity. They have given so much to the dressage community over the years, and I am a very thankful recipient of their generosity. 🐾



**Elise Elman and Moca compete at the Hoosier Horse Park.**



**George Williams with Chuck and Joann Smith’s Rocher**

Photos by Michael Knoechel (far left) and Elise Elman





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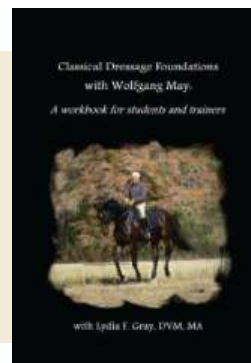




Compiled by Kat Neis

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## How Can I Fix a Lazy Rein-back?



When riding a rein-back, my horse drags his hind legs. How can I get him to lift his legs while backing up?

Name withheld by request

### JENNIFER KAISER

The rein-back is a challenging movement that can have multiple problems. Even the top horses and riders in the world respect this movement and approach it carefully. However, most of the time, if the horse and rider can remember that it's not about stopping or pulling backward, problems can be avoided. Dragging the hind legs can be caused by the horse losing his forward feeling or by misunderstanding the movement.

After the horse has learned to calmly halt, square up and accept the connection while standing still, we can work on correcting the rein-back. Three elements are key to a successful rein-back: understanding, relaxation and an active hind leg. We need to help the horse understand how to back up slowly, deliberately, in diagonal pairs and without tension. While working on the rein-back, the horse should feel like he could willingly go forward at any time. If it feels like the horse has become stuck, send him forward into a brisk walk or trot. Making several trot-walk-halt-trot transitions will help get the horse thinking forward again.

Let's start with the idea that the halt is relaxed and the horse is willing to rein-back, but that the steps are unclear and the hind feet are dragging. Using the turn on the forehand will help to mobilize the horse's hind legs and create stepping rather than dragging. Start with bringing the horse to the halt and then ask him to move sideways off one leg into a side pass (full pass). This will get the horse moving his hind legs. Gradually ask the forehand to lessen its sideways progression and bring the hind legs actively, step-by-step, into a turn on the forehand. Ask the horse to stop, and then make another step or two sideways with the hind legs. Walk away and repeat this exercise until he is responsive to your aids in a relaxed way. If, at any point, the horse starts to get tense or misunderstands, ride forward, change the subject and return to these exercises after relaxation has been re-established. After the horse is comfortable moving off one leg, repeat the exercise on the other side. The purpose of the exercise is to teach the horse to move off the leg without going through the reins (stepping forward).

After the horse and rider are comfortable with the turn on the forehand in both directions, we can begin to work on improving the rein-back. Start with asking for one or two steps of the turn on the forehand. Next, apply the outside aids, slightly lessen the inside leg and ask for the rein-back. Ask for only one step. If the horse steps relaxed, ask him to move forward, do another couple steps of turn on the forehand, then ask again for the rein-back, two steps this time. This should improve his acceptance of the rein-back aids and, over time, help the horse to understand to lift the legs in diagonal pairs.

One other issue can arise when working on your rein-back: The horse may start picking up his feet appropriately but not maintain straightness as he backs up. While straightness is important, don't worry too much about it at first. Achieving a relaxed rein-back with active hind legs is more important at this stage. Once you have this, you will find that getting the horse to stay straight in the rein-back will become a fairly easy issue to fix.



**The rein-back is a challenging movement that can have multiple problems. Even the top horses and riders in the world respect this movement and approach it carefully. Here, British Olympian Carl Hester demonstrates the ideal rein-back on Uthopia.**

Plan on working on these exercises over a series of rides. You may spend several rides just working on the side pass and turn on the forehand to confirm that the horse can do these movements in a relaxed manner. Then start to focus on the rein-back. If you don't rush this work, you should end up with a relaxed, active rein-back.



### Jennifer Kaiser

is a USDF bronze, silver and gold medalist as well as a USDF certified instructor through Second Level and a USDF "L" Education Program graduate with distinction. With her assistant, Korin Rinaldo, she operates Kaiser Dressage out of Forrest Hill Farm, in Lafayette, Indiana.

## How Do I Stay on My Seat During Transitions?

**Q** I'm having a hard time staying on my seat. My horse easily pulls me out of the saddle onto my crotch during transitions, particularly downward transitions. I feel leaning back is not really an option, or is it? Do you know any exercises that can help me stay on my seat during transitions?  
Name withheld by request

### KATIE HOEFS-MARTIN

In a smooth transition the horse will maintain balance, suppleness and energy. The horse will shift more weight onto his hind end and off the front end without

losing energy from the hind legs, like a plane landing on a runway. If the nose or front-end drops and the energy decreases on or before the touchdown, there's a crash. Some of the most common faults

on the rider's behalf that cause a heavy transition are collapsing in the body, a loose seat and pulling or balancing on the reins, which all stem from a weak core.

To address the point in the question,

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leaning back in the downward transitions is not an option. When you lean back in the downward transitions, your seat bones are driven into the horse's back, causing the horse to hollow his back, putting more weight onto his forehand, causing him to lose energy and putting the hind legs more behind than under his body. Essentially, if you lean back, it will increase the problem of the horse's weight falling into your hands rather than fixing it.

For a good transition you should maintain an independent seat, a strong core and a balanced head-shoulder-hip-heel alignment. If you collapse and lose your balance, the horse will also lose his balance and fall on the forehand into your hands. Instead, weight your seat, lift your upper abdominal muscles and mid-back muscles, as if you were taking a deep breath. If you feel the horse pull,



© ollophotography

**One of the most common issues that cause a loose seat in heavy transitions is the rider's core fitness. To improve core fitness, using a mix of Pilates and yoga exercises can be quite effective.**

support him with your core, shoulders and upper back, not your arms, and think of transitioning the extra weight into a balanced seat. I envision an oak tree, and if something pulled on my branches, I would take the extra weight in my trunk (core) and roots (seat), rather than react

as a willow tree, where my branches are floppy with a lot of give and take and can be pulled easily, which would happen if I collapsed in my midsection and tried to use just my arms to support my horse's balance. In the oak tree versus willow tree image, your body doesn't fall back onto

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the horse's mouth when you rebalance, but holds a strong, balanced position.

Another important point to be aware of is if you use your hands before your seat it causes the horse to pull on the reins in the down transitions. This exercise is helpful to practice to use your seat before your hand and encourage the horse to listen to your seat. Start by riding in a working gait, making sure there is a good quality and balance. When you ask for a down transition, sit tall, putting your weight in your seat and legs, stopping the motion with your back and core. If the horse doesn't listen or falls forward, immediately follow with a stronger rein aid, maintaining your solid core to help clarify with the horse what you want. With practice, your horse will start to realize that the seat is the down or half-halt aid, and

not the hands. This is extremely important for collecting the gaits as well since you will increasingly ask the horse for more down transitions in the gait.

One of the most common issues that cause a loose seat in heavy transitions is the rider's core fitness. To improve core fitness, I find that using a mix of Pilates and yoga exercises can be quite effective. They work the front, side and back muscles of the core. Stretching exercises are also important as they loosen up your body and prevent you from tightening into the bad posture habits that we develop when not riding.

In conclusion, for balanced transitions the horse must maintain balance and energy and not fall onto the forehand. As the rider, you need to provide a solid—not tense or bracing—posture in order not to disturb your horse's balance and



## Katie Hoefs-Martin

is a USDF bronze, silver and gold medalist and has earned her USDF silver and gold Freestyle Bar. She graduated from the USDF "L" Education

Program with distinction and is working toward her "r" judge's license. She trains and competes horses from young-horse to Grand Prix level at KHM Dressage in California.

be prepared to support or aid his balance to keep weight on his hind end. An independent seat and strong core are imperative to achieve these goals. It is equally important/necessary then to practice a good riding posture and develop a strong, effective core. Using unmounted exercises to improve these points help increase your ability to be effective on the horse.

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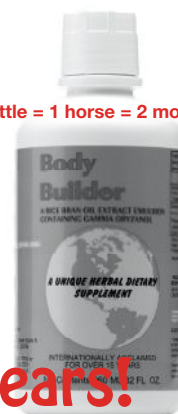
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## Should I Punish My Horse for Misbehavior?

**Q** When is the right time to punish a horse: when he bucks, spooks or doesn't respond to the aids I gave? As a rider, I don't have a lot of confidence and am confused about the aspect of punishing a horse. Also, how do I punish him: smacking him with the whip or giving a sharp half halt?

Lisa Churn, Buffalo, New York

### JAIME AMAIN

The most important thing to understand is that the concept of punishment does not apply to horses and riding. You cannot punish a horse when you have a bad ride or something goes wrong. Instead, you correct the behavior. Horses do not understand when they have done something that we consider bad behavior or wrong.

The first thing to do is to understand and try correcting the aids and signals you physically gave to your horse. Once you correct this rider-to-horse translation, your continuous conversation will become easier. When correcting a behavior, you must do so right away, not when the ride is over. This correction must be done a maximum of three seconds after the behavior. Any re-

action just a few seconds after and the horse will not understand what he has done. In his mind you are getting after him for nothing, therefore damaging the relationship with your horse. The correction depends on the movement you are executing and the severity of the horse's reaction or lack of reaction.

One of the first things to consider when your horse rejects your aids is that he may be in pain or discomfort. Many horses will object to a movement by trying to self-serve. Maybe their back is sore or a leg doesn't feel right. If this is truly not the case, make sure your horse is in front of your leg aids and going forward. Go back to the basics and work on upward and downward transitions, establishing your horse on the aids. Start with a forward response to the aids.

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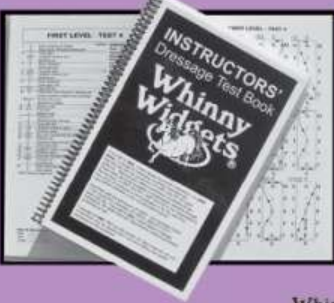
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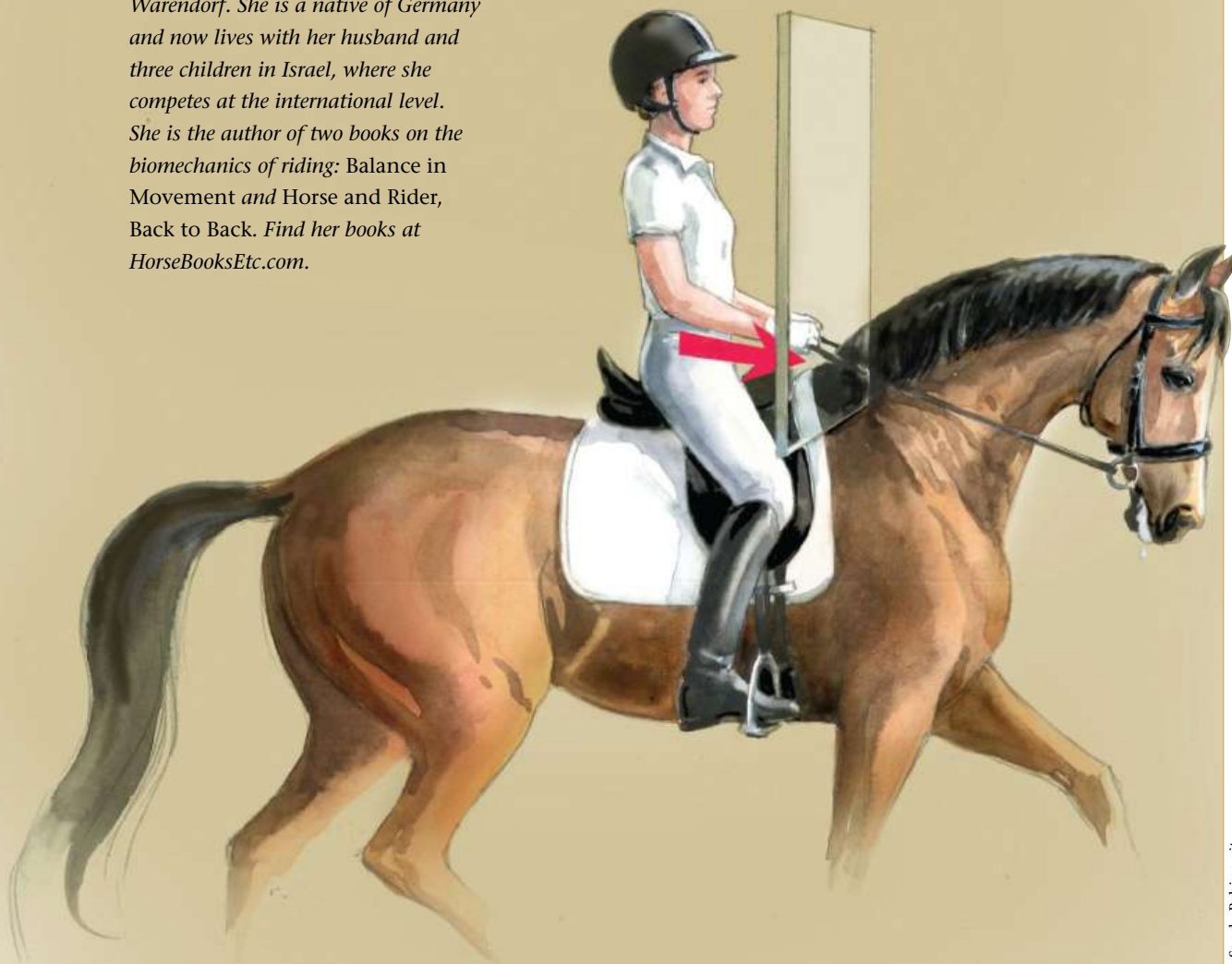
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*Susanne von Dietze is a leader in equestrian biomechanics. A physiotherapist, licensed Trainer A instructor and judge for dressage and show jumping, she gives lectures and seminars throughout the world, including at the prestigious German Riding Academy in Warendorf. She is a native of Germany and now lives with her husband and three children in Israel, where she competes at the international level. She is the author of two books on the biomechanics of riding: Balance in Movement and Horse and Rider, Back to Back. Find her books at [HorseBooksEtc.com](http://HorseBooksEtc.com).*



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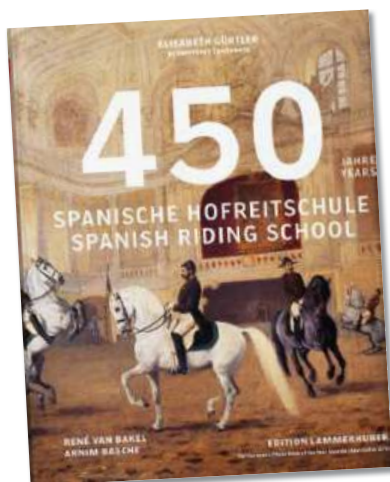
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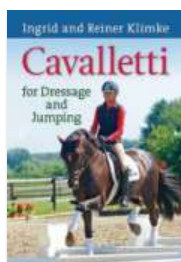
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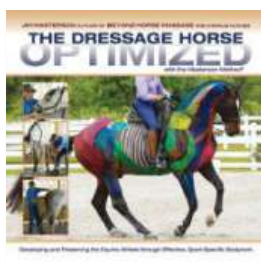
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# Dressage

TODAY

U.S. Olympian Steffen Peters and his wife, Shannon, an international dressage competitor, recently opened their San Diego home to *Dressage Today*, giving readers a peek into their lives beyond the barn. Here the couple sits in their split-level, contemporary house beneath a wall of awards and photographs from Steffen's appearances at the 1994 U.S. Olympic Festival in St. Louis, Missouri, the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, the 2006 WEG in Aachen, Germany, the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China, and the 2010 WEG in Lexington, Kentucky. Displayed on the table are the team and individual gold medals he won at the Pan Am Games in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 2011 and in Toronto, Canada, in 2015.

Learn more about this dynamic duo in *DT's* special bonus section (p. F2).

FLIP 'OW!

Terri Miller





FLIP OVER FOR THE OCTOBER ISSUE

# Dressage

T O D A Y

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# AT HOME IN *San Diego* .....WITH..... SHANNON & STEFFEN PETERS

The 2015 Pan American Games double gold winner opens the doors to his California-base.

*By Kelly Sanchez • Photos by Terri Miller*

It's 8 o'clock on a Saturday morning in June, and Arroyo Del Mar has been quietly humming for hours. Two horses are blowing off steam in the turnouts, while others, like Steffen Peters' rising star Rosamunde, linger in their outdoor runs, keeping an eye on the action. Across the property, Steffen and his World Equestrian Games (WEG) and World Cup partner, Legolas, are alone in the manicured dressage arena, getting in one of their final training sessions before heading east for the Pan American Games in Toronto, Canada. Assistant trainer Lientje Schueler and Steffen's assistant, Dawn White O'Connor, are at a show with





Tucked into a canyon a few miles from the Pacific Ocean, Arroyo Del Mar is a 22-acre property encircled by hills and planted with towering eucalyptus trees. There's a covered arena—complete with a state-of-the-art sound system—a 65-stall barn, round pens and generous turnouts, a sizable jumping arena and the dressage court.

**OPPOSITE: U.S. Olympian Steffen Peters and his wife, Shannon, an international dressage competitor (shown with Steffen's rising star, Rosamunde), operate their training business out of their home, Arroyo Del Mar, in San Diego, California. Every night the couple walks down to the barn to visit the horses and give them cookies.**

clients, and an air of calm hangs over the farm. It's peaceful and orderly.

Tucked into a canyon a few miles from the Pacific Ocean, the facility is reached by way of a winding dirt road that does little to announce that up ahead is the home and training barn of one of the world's top dressage riders. Steffen and his wife, Shannon, wouldn't have it any other way. At the bottom of the hill, the 22-acre property comes into view, encircled by hills and planted with towering eucalyptus trees, a meandering stream running through the center. At the entrance, a small sign reads simply, "Arroyo Del Mar." There's a covered arena—complete with a state-of-the-art sound system that Steffen installed to help Legolas

prepare for competition—a 65-stall barn, round pens and generous turnouts. A bridge leads over the stream to a sizable jumping arena and the dressage court.

Just up the hill at the house, Shannon welcomes a visitor despite having been up since 3:30 a.m. to tend to the couple's 17-year-old dog, Fritz. Steffen soon joins her with Betty, their 7-year-old Labradoodle, close by his side. She follows him everywhere. "She acknowledges me," laughs Shannon. "When Steffen leaves for a competition, she'll wait by the door for at least a couple of days."

### California Living

The split-level, contemporary house is as low-key as its inhabitants—warm and

comfortable with dark wood floors and rustic furniture and offices for each of them. Above the sofa in the high-ceilinged living room, Shannon has arranged a wall of awards and photographs from Steffen's appearances at the 1994 U.S. Olympic Festival in St. Louis, Missouri, the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, the 2006 WEG in Aachen, Germany, the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China, and the 2010 WEG in Lexington, Kentucky. The team and individual gold medals he won at the Pan Am Games in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 2011 lie on a table, awaiting permanent placement. Steffen is visibly uncomfortable when his accomplishments are mentioned and he's quick to credit the horses he rode on each occasion—Udon,



**Betty, Steffen and Shannon's 7-year-old Labradoodle, follows Steffen everywhere. When Steffen leaves for a competition, she'll wait by the door for at least a couple of days.**

Floriano, Ravel and Weltino's Magic.

Family pictures are on display along with two impressive bronze sculptures—one of Ravel in piaffe and the other depicting Steffen and Udon. Charcoal drawings by Steffen's late father line the staircase leading to the guest bedrooms. Steffen's office, which he calls his "man cave," has a TV and several recliners for watching football. If you didn't know to look for them, you just might miss the framed letters from Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama acknowledging his participation on U.S. Olympic teams.

And then there's the Christmas tree that stands near the dining area. "It's the Easter tree, the spring tree, the fall tree, the Halloween tree, the Thanksgiving tree, the Christmas tree, the New Year's tree," Shannon explains. "It's been with us for 12 years. We took it down once. But it was so empty that we had to put it back up again."

The couple moved their business from a nearby stable to Arroyo in 2006, after the owner of their previous facility passed away and they had just 60 days to relocate. "We had 35 horses, so finding

a place wasn't easy," says Shannon. She asked Steffen about Arroyo. It wasn't for sale and the Stewart family, who owned it, hadn't contemplated selling. But when she and Steffen met with them to discuss the idea, they said, "For you, we'd sell it."

Lila Kommerstad, Steffen's first sponsor, purchased Arroyo with the understanding that the couple would take on all financial obligations for the property. It was, Shannon concedes, "a big nut," but she was convinced they could make it work. Steffen was less confident. "I'm extremely conservative when it comes to financial obligations, and I was scared out of my mind," he says. "But Shanni kept saying, 'It's going to be fine.' She was 100 percent right."

They moved into the house in 2008. Wanting to put their own stamp on the place, they laid new floors, redid the kitchen, bathrooms and the pool, painted and later added the dressage arena. "We lived upstairs while there was a huge construction zone downstairs," Steffen recalls. "That was right in the middle of the 2008 Olympic Trials—we

won't do that again!"

The house is private, yet close enough to keep track of what's going on in the barn. "I have that 'mother hearing,'" says Shannon. "I can hear if a horse is kicking in the middle of the night."

## **A Life with Horses**

The couple doesn't micromanage, allowing ranch foreman Carlos Piñeda and stable manager Keri Homer to do their jobs. But Shannon oversees the day-to-day business of running the facility and the boarding business.

Having worked together for so long, the couple is typically united in decision-making. "We'll talk about things over breakfast and then we're done with it," says Shannon. "It's not a constant conversation all day long." Notes Steffen, "A lot of people think I'm the boss around here, but it's clearly Shanni."

Their mutual respect extends to how they train the horses. "As much as we want to help one other, we both understand that we each do things our own way," Shannon explains. "We're both perfectionists and come from different backgrounds—I've been riding with Karl Mikolka for 18 years and I do things differently than Steffen does. For couples in this business, it's one of the biggest things you have to learn."

After meeting at a clinic in Denver, Colorado, Shannon and Steffen married in 2004. In the beginning of their relationship, Shannon recalls that Steffen would offer to get on a horse to address a training issue she might be having. "And I'd say 'No, you're not getting on. This is my horse.' It's been a longstanding joke between us that it takes me a week to fix what he can fix in one ride. He wants to help so badly, but he's learned not to bother anymore. But every once in a while, I'll ask him to get on for a second, and he'll say, 'Wait... what?!'"

Ashleigh Luca-Tyson has been training with Steffen for nearly nine





years and began working with Shannon soon after. The Arizona-based trainer spends anywhere from a few weeks to several months each summer at Arroyo with several clients as well as her competition horses, who include San Soucis K and Wellknown. Luca-Tyson stays with the couple and relishes the sense of calm she finds there. "They're very peaceful people, and everything is very quiet. Everything's tidy; there's nice music playing, and Shannon has the coffee on every morning. I'm the mother of a toddler, so it's a little like going to the spa. It's nice to see two

people who can do things separately but also work together for a common goal. They really respect each other and one another's individuality."

Luca-Tyson and her husband even named Steffen and Shannon as godpar-

ents to their 3-year-old daughter, Addison. "Shannon makes her behave and Steffen lets her do whatever she wants," she says with a laugh.

No matter what success Steffen has had, Luca-Tyson says he hasn't changed.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: A Christmas tree is left up year round and decorated for each holiday. Charcoal drawings by Steffen's late father line the staircase leading to the guest bedrooms. Team and individual gold medals Steffen won at the Pan Am Games in Toronto in 2015 and Guadalajara in 2011 lie on a table, awaiting permanent placement. Bronze sculptures—one of Ravel in piaffe and the other depicting Steffen and Udon.**



**LEFT: Steffen's passion for motorized planes and model gliders began when he was 7, building airplanes with his father in Germany. His small hangar at Arroyo stores 13 planes in all, including one with a 31-foot wingspan.**



**RIGHT: In addition to riding and teaching, Shannon bikes, taking her Pinarello racing bike on grueling 25- to 50-mile rides.**

"It doesn't matter what he wins. It's always about the horses. I'll say, 'Congratulations,' and the first thing is always, 'I have a really great horse.' He never really takes credit for his own accomplishments but always passes it to the horses, Shannon and the sponsorship."

Over the years, Luca-Tyson has come to rely not only on the couple's coaching but on their professional advice as well. "Whether it's a question about how to do a horse deal or how to manage something in the barn, they never judge. The help is positive and constructive at the same time."

That's not to say they don't like to have fun, she adds. "Steffen and Shannon both have a very funny sense of humor, and the three of us text a lot of in-

side jokes to each other—funny pictures and things we find on the Internet." The online brokerage firm E\*Trade's talking baby commercial featuring Bobo the Clown quickly became a favorite, and when Luca-Tyson celebrated her 27th birthday in San Diego, Steffen hired Bobo the Clown as a surprise.

But when he went to pick up Bobo from the entrance to the property, the surprise was on him. The clown he'd hired turned out to be a woman and she didn't look like a clown at all. "Steffen was super disappointed," Luca-Tyson recalls. "He said, 'I thought I hired Bobo, and you can't even tell it's Bobo.' I'll never forget it. She made us balloon animals and I had to ride in my lesson with a big butterfly on my face."

### **Work Hard, Play Hard**

The couple obviously enjoys life at Arroyo. Most mornings Shannon rises at 4:30 to make breakfast and coffee for the staff and anyone else lucky enough to be in the barn. She then rides and teaches from 6:45 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Friday. Steffen also trains five days a week. "In the summer I'm on my first horse at 6; otherwise, I start at 7. Legolas still takes most of my strength and mental abilities, so I like to start with him. Then it's usually Rosie afterward."

Every year, Shannon makes Thanksgiving dinner for everyone at the farm, and the couple's Christmas party has become an annual event that lasts late into the night. In 2009, after Steffen and Ravel swept the dressage classes at Aachen, they had a big party with Ravel's owner, Akiko Yamazaki, bringing a cake topped with a model of Steffen and Ravel for the occasion.

But mostly they call themselves "loners," content to go to dinner and a movie at the end of their busy days. "Spending time at a quiet restaurant somewhere, that's what we love to do," says Steffen.

Not surprisingly for two competitive athletes, the couple's down time involves






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Shannon and Steffen call themselves “loners,” content to go to dinner and a movie at the end of their busy days or relax at home with Betty and their other dog, 17-year-old Fritz.

some pretty challenging pursuits. “We’re both passionate about other things,” says Shannon. “Maybe not as passionate as we are about the horses, but close.”

She works out twice a week, takes her

Pinarello racing bike on grueling 25- to 50-mile rides and also plays a mean game of tennis. “I’m honing new skills and trying to change my swing from what it was when I used to play. It’s a

work in progress!”

Steffen isn’t so sure. “I have yet to see the day when I can win a match against Shannon.” She laughs. “It’s the one thing I’m better at than you.”

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She's also a serious baker, making gluten-free scones, muffins, cinnamon cake or banana bread for the staff's breakfast each day. "I would be a baker if I weren't a horse trainer," she says. "It's been a fun challenge to do it gluten-free, sometimes vegan, and to make things that are actually edible."

In addition to his workouts three times a week, Steffen jet-skis. But he'll tell you that his favorite place on earth—next to Arroyo Del Mar—is the Torrey Pines Glider Port, perched 600 feet above the Pacific. When the wind is right, he heads there in the afternoons to fly radio-controlled gliders. "It's a great way to be in touch with nature. You learn to read the wind, how to calculate your risks when the wind dies, how to judge your altitude."

It all began when he was 7, building

airplanes with his father in Germany. He picked it up again before the 2012 Olympics in London, starting with motorized planes and then becoming certified to fly model gliders. He even

**“We're extremely fortunate to be in a beautiful place like Arroyo Del Mar.”**

has a small hangar at Arroyo where he stores and tinkers with his planes—13 in all, including one with a 31-foot wingspan—and programs transmitters and receivers.

"It's an absolutely fascinating hobby, though it can get slightly excessive,"

he admits with a grin. "But I have a very tolerant wife, who is accepting of multiple airplanes and customized vans for transporting the planes. With horses, you have to accept that some days are not as productive because they don't learn every single day at the same speed. To have a very productive hobby where you see the results is probably part of the fascination."

It's close to noon, and soon Shannon will be heading up Arroyo's steep road for a long bike ride while Steffen will take off with his gliders for an afternoon of flying at Torrey Pines.

"We're extremely fortunate to be in a beautiful place like Arroyo Del Mar," he says. Adds Shannon, "Whenever we come home from somewhere, we'll say, 'There's no better place to be.' We love where we live and what we do." 📷

## Arroyo Del Mar

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Photo Credit: Sydney Prather

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**- Steffen and Shannon Peters**



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# THE

# ULTIMATE WINTER GEAR GUIDE

Tried-and-true tips from the pros to help you select the best gear for you and your horse.

By Kat Neis and Lindsay Paulsen • Illustrations by Sandy Rabinowitz

**A**s the winter months approach, it's time to start thinking ahead and preparing for cooler temperatures. From purchasing thermal layers to insulated snow boots or extra blankets for your herd, there are many steps to prepare for winter, regardless of where in the country you and your horse are located.

For many of us, navigating the marketplace for items that provide protection from the elements for horse and human can be overwhelming. To help you find products that fit your needs this winter, we've compiled a guide of winter wardrobe essentials for horse and rider that we think might belong in your tack room or closet. We've enlisted the help of equestrian-gear expert Jennifer Hetzler, of Equus Now! Tack Shop based near Columbus, Ohio, to offer advice on what to look for in each of these cold-weather items. Additionally, we've consulted with several established dressage trainers across the country who face seasonal weather challenges and have discovered ways to combat cold temperatures and inclement weather.

Even though riding in the winter can certainly be challenging, with the right apparel for you and your horse, you may discover that winter can be more productive than ever before.

“For my horses, I use three different blanket weights that I layer, if necessary. In Colorado, the temperature can change frequently, so sometimes I layer blankets at night and then remove a layer for daytime turnout.”

**Sandy Hotz, Colorado**

## For the Horse

### Cooler

**Purpose:** Can be placed over the horse before and after exercise to keep him warm and dry, to wick moisture and/or prevent him from cooling off too quickly, which can result in shivering, tense muscles or muscle spasms.

**Remember:** Although coolers come in many forms, dress coolers that fit closely to the body of the horse are more popular than square coolers that can cover the horse past his neck. “Some riders, however,





“For riding in the winter, I can’t live without my insulated riding boots to keep my feet comfortable.”

**Sandy Hotz,  
Colorado**

“For my horses, I like to make sure that the blankets I buy have a good fit through the shoulder so they don’t rub the horses’ manes out.”

**Stacy Posthumus,  
Michigan**

do prefer square coolers because they can be helpful for larger horses that tend to not dry out as well on their necks,” Hetzler says. “These often have ties in front instead of buckles and the open front can allow air to circulate better. You can also fold them back more gradually than a dress cooler as the horse dries and cools. This can be particularly helpful for horses with arthritis in their necks. However, due to their more cumbersome size and shape, many people opt for the dress cooler.”

### **Quarter Sheet**

*Purpose:* Quarter sheets serve a similar purpose as coolers, but are worn while the horse is in work and cover the hindquarters. Quarter sheets are available in various cuts and styles. Some versions are secured underneath the saddle while others are designed to fit over the saddle and can be easily removed without the need to dismount or shift the saddle.

*Remember:* “Polar fleece and Polartec are preferred materials because they are lightweight and

moisture-wicking,” Hetzler says.

Polartec tends to be preferred over Polar fleece, as it is smoother, doesn’t pill as much as Polar fleece and has more breathability.

“Wool is moisture-wicking, too, but often needs to be dry-cleaned and is heavy. Merino wool is another option, as it is lighter than regular wool, but still needs to be dry-cleaned,” she says.

### **Irish Knit**

*Purpose:* Irish knits, also known as string coolers, can be used alone or underneath a heavier fleece or wool cooler to increase moisture-wicking action and help to evenly cool out a horse. Some versions can also be used as additional blanket liners. An Irish knit placed underneath a cooler sucks moisture off the horse. Warm air goes between the layers to help cool the horse off and get him to dry faster.

*Remember:* “When selecting an Irish knit sheet, you really want to get one that is well stitched because the loose weave of the cords needs to be held together,” Hetzler says. A poorly stitched sheet is more likely to lose its shape quickly and might eventually fall apart. She also says to check the way that the fabric is woven because these kinds of sheets can snag very easily. “I prefer

“I use ceramic-heat-therapy undergarments to keep my body warm. They are great at keeping warmth near the body without making me overheat. I also have a pair of ski pants that I put on over my breeches after riding, and I make sure to have hand and feet warmers at the ready.”

**Ann Guptill, Connecticut**

Irish knits without surcingles because they are easier to take off quickly. Also, if it is being used as an undersheet for wicking purposes, it is safer without surcingles.” And, believe it or not, the color of the knit can also affect its absorbency. According to Hetzler, the most common color for an Irish knit is



usually natural because it tends to be more absorbent. With a cotton fabric, once it has been dyed a darker color, the knit becomes less absorbent.

### Therapeutic Blanket

*Purpose:* Therapeutic blankets are available in many styles for various uses. The most common therapeutic blankets on the market are designed to promote overall health and alleviate various aches and pains. They commonly incorporate heat-reflecting infrared material to increase blood circulation, soothe muscles and/or warm the horse. Other models can incorporate the use of ionic therapy, liquid titanium or magnets. While the blankets can be used in a variety of climates, many riders and trainers choose to use them especially in colder weather as quarter sheets, coolers and blanket liners.

*Remember:* Many professionals consider therapeutic blankets to be staples in their barns, and they come in quarter sheets, mesh sheets, fleece sheets and turnout blankets. "There's a definite place in every barn for a therapeutic blanket," Hetzler says. "I've seen a lot of horses really benefit from their use."

## For the Rider

A turtle-neck or mock turtle-neck shirt made out of a moisture-wicking technical fabric typically makes for a suitable **base layer**. Hetzler says that shirts worn for sun protection or those made from Ice-fil or a similar moisture-wicking material are often good options. You also might consider investing in a Polartec

sweater or pullover as an additional layer.

A **vest** can make a good addition to a winter wardrobe, acting as another layer or can be worn in place of a jacket in more moderate weather.

Hetzler recommends a vest with

"For dealing with the long, cold winters of Michigan, I depend on a winter breech that has a nonbulky, flattering fit yet still keeps me warm. I also ride in gloves that are waterproof and have a Polar fleece lining that keeps my hands extra warm."

**Stacy Posthumus, Michigan**

Polartec or Polartec lining but says that down vests are good options, too. If you prefer a down vest, look for one that is less bulky to help you move better in the saddle. Vests made with Thinsulate can also be good because they help you retain heat without adding bulk.

Look for a **jacket** that is vented in the back and gathers in the middle. This is more flattering and also insulates heat. A jacket that is windproof and waterproof is ideal for snow.

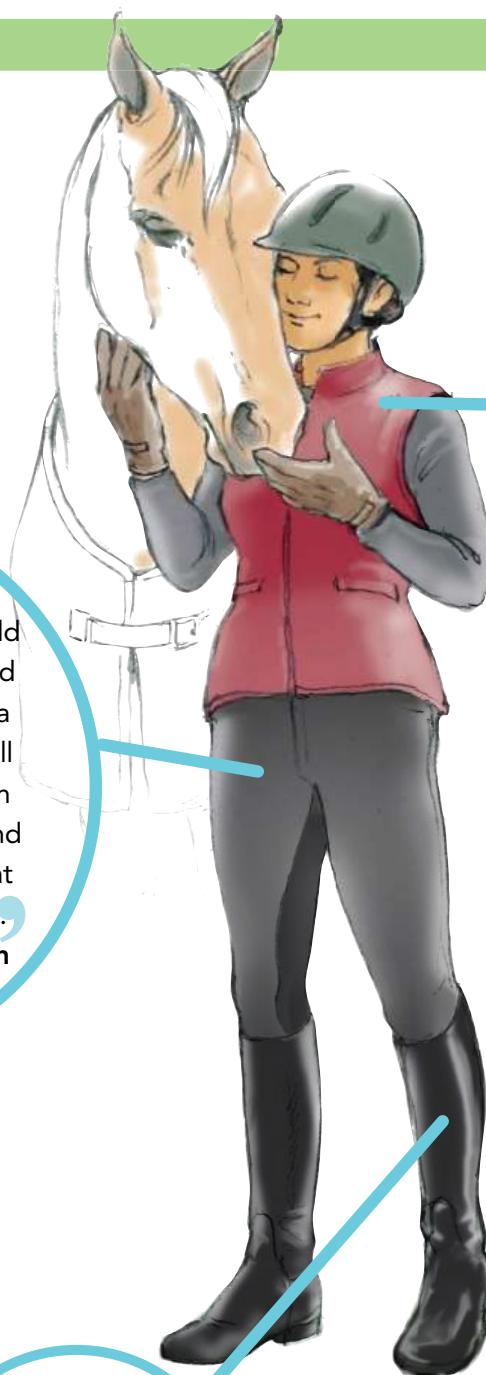
Compression **socks** are great for

"I like to buy wool ski socks from a local sporting-goods store."

**Teri Patton-Rich, Arizona**

winter riding. Look for socks that provide support in the foot and ankle area, stay up and provide compression. Some people prefer to ride in thin socks with tall boots, but thicker ones tend to provide more heat.

There are several options nowadays in terms of winter riding **footwear**.





"I absolutely love and cannot live without my down vest! The soft, quilted down and water-repellant coating make it perfect for cold days, and it looks great, too. I wear this vest everywhere, however, it's the very best as a body warmer between riding horses and teaching lessons. It also comes with an inside chest pocket with a cord exit for music and deep, fleece-lined pockets to keep hands warm."

**Karen Pavicic, British Columbia,  
Canada**

"Make keeping your feet warm a priority," Hetzler says. There's been a movement away from bulkier boots and lots of companies are starting to make boots that follow this trend. If you prefer to ride in half chaps, you can also look for a pair of insulated **paddock boots and half chaps** that provide a similar amount of warmth.

Hetzler recommends a

nonbulky fleece-lined **glove** that has additional grip for riding. However, for barn work, she says that bulkier gloves are sometimes preferred.

There are a variety of options on the market for winter **breeches**. "If you're riding in a full seat or knee patch, there are fleece-lined breeches that are nice enough to show in," Hetzler says. For maximum warmth, look for a wind-proof fabric. If you want a pair of waterproof breeches, look for something that has a taped seam on the inside to keep them waterproof. Breeches with high-quality seams will also be more comfortable and won't rub. Fleece-lined tights can be great if you mainly plan to

## Helpful Tips for Sheeting and Blanketing

There's a lot to be said on the topic of blanketing and much of it is dependent on specific horses in specific climates. As a general rule, Hetzler recommends that it is ideal to own a turnout sheet, a medium-weight blanket and a heavy-weight blanket.

Rain sheets come in a variety of versions that can either be used for turnout, riding or standing ringside. They can be used simply to protect tack in inclement weather and keep your horse dry or can serve as lightweight and often breathable waterproof protection for horses turned out. For horses in harsher climates, rain sheets can be layered with heavier blankets to provide an additional level of protection from the elements.

If you're on the hunt for a rain sheet, look first and foremost for a sheet that is waterproof and durable. "The more dense the fabric is, the more durable the sheet will be," Hetzler advises. For example, a 600-denier fabric tends to be less dense, a 1200-denier fabric is moderately dense, and 1600 denier is highly dense. Sheets made out of ballistic nylon can be ideal because they are more breathable, waterproof and durable. Hetzler adds to also be sure to look

for fabric that is rip-stop, which is easier to patch up. Sheets can make great layering tools. Layering creates a section where there is air between the blanket and the liner, which is what helps keep the horse warmer.

If you live in a more temperate climate or are interested in more budget-friendly alternatives, consider a blanket-liner. It can be a helpful layering tool that provides more warmth than a sheet but isn't as heavy as a blanket.

As far as blankets go, high-neck versions are useful for layering. When a horse reaches down to graze, the higher-cut neck opening prevents water and snow from getting in, preventing sheets or other layers from getting wet.

Neck covers for blankets can be helpful additions for those who live in very cold climates. There are various versions of blankets that either come with a neck cover permanently attached, while in other versions, it can be removed. Hetzler says that many people prefer versions with detachable necks because they tend to be more versatile.

*For more information about blanketing, sheeting and other winter care, visit [dressageatoday.com](http://dressageatoday.com).*

ride at home, but make sure to check if they are windproof. Consider investing in a pair of **long underwear**, which can add an additional layer of warmth without the bulk.

"**Neck warmers** can be great to do exactly what their name suggests," Hetzler says. There are also some Polar fleece head covers on the market that fit under your helmet and cover your head and ears.

## Tips from Trainers

### Jessica Wisdom, Washington

- For staying warm and dry in the rain, I wear an all-season, full-seat breech. These breeches are made of a micro-fiber fabric that both wicks away moisture and keeps me insulated.
- I also wear thermal layers under my riding jacket in order to maintain body heat in damp conditions.
- To keep my feet warm and dry in the mud, I recommend a 100-percent waterproof boot, which is perfect for muddy conditions in Washington. My favorite boots have a comfortable fit, good traction on ice and are lined with heat-insulating faux fur.
- For my horses, the biggest challenge is keeping them dry. For the stallions who like to destroy their blankets, I use rugs

that are heavy-duty, wear well and keep the horses warm in heavy downpours.

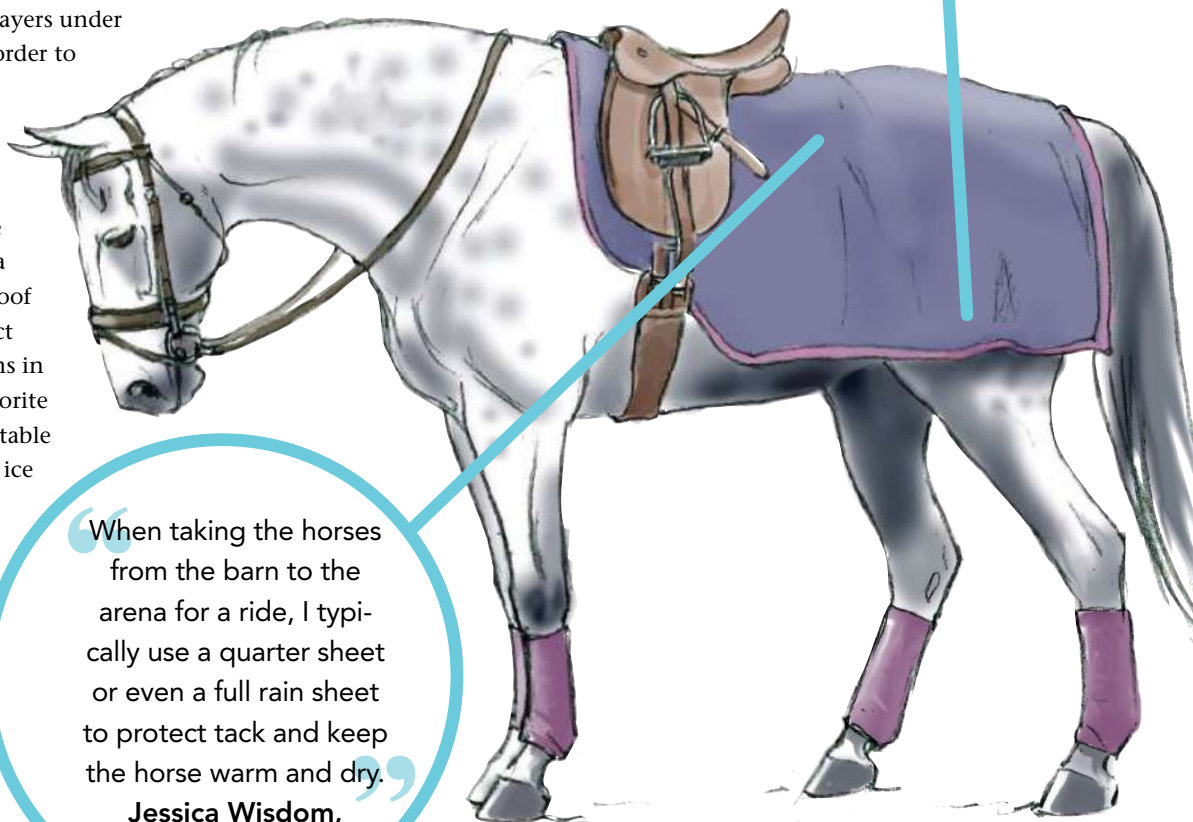
- In the colder winter months, I use ceramic-therapy products to get the horses limbered up before exercise, especially after being outside in the damp weather.

### Teri Patton-Rich, Arizona

- In the Arizona mountains, the temperature fluctuates

"I really love my ceramic-heat-therapy fleece rug for my horses. It can be used as a cooler after work sessions to help muscle recovery, as a layer underneath a waterproof blanket for transport and before riding to warm up muscles. I really do feel that my horses benefit from using it. Layering is super important in the winter months, especially in climates that fluctuate in temperature on a daily basis and with performance horses that live inside a stable and receive turnout during the day."

**Karen Pavicic, British Columbia, Canada**



"When taking the horses from the barn to the arena for a ride, I typically use a quarter sheet or even a full rain sheet to protect tack and keep the horse warm and dry."

**Jessica Wisdom,  
Washington**



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throughout the day. Therefore, I make sure to layer my riding clothes to deal with changing temperatures. I often wear moisture-wicking, heat-insulating layers under my riding clothes, as they are warm, light and fit well under my breeches and jackets.

- For my horses, I layer their blankets and often use a blanket liner

“I recommend purchasing blankets with shoulder gussets in order to prevent shoulder rubs from occurring.”

**Teri Patton-Rich,  
Arizona**

under heavy blankets. This liner adds an extra layer of insulation and warmth, especially for cold nights.

### **Sandy Hotz, Colorado**

- When teaching in the winter, I like to wear a full-length down coat with a hood. I also wear insulated snow boots purchased from an outdoor-supply company. They are similar to moon boots from the 70s and are good for teaching and barn work.
- If I keep my head and feet warm, my entire body stays much warmer when working and riding in the cold temperatures.

### **Ann Guptill, Connecticut**

- A handy tip for hand warmers: If you get the 12-hour hand warmers but use them less than 12 hours,



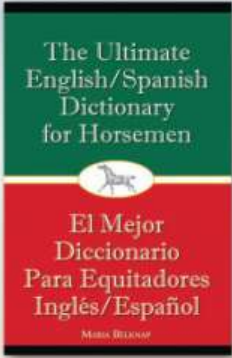
you can save them for the next day. I learned from a client to put them in a Ziploc bag overnight, and you will still have a few hours of heat in them the next day. This will save a few dollars a week if you are buying them at \$1 to \$2 a pack. If you live in the Northeast, it is best to buy a case of hand warmers before the cold weather starts. This year it became a little difficult to find them locally by mid-February.

"I use blanket hoods to keep the horses warmer on those super frigid days. Our massage therapist recommended them for some of the horses that brace against the cold. It is an easy layer to add or take off when the temperatures fluctuate. We have some horses that have light, waterproof ones added to their turnout gear to keep them dry during snowstorms."

**Ann Guptill, Connecticut**

#### **Karen Pavicic, British Columbia, Canada**

- I like an all-weather jacket, which is especially good for those who ride outdoors in rainy or snowy weather. Not only is it water resistant, but it has a unique design of a back skirt zippered gusset that fits over the top of your saddle, keeping it dry, too. This kind of jacket is very functional and also looks good. 🐾




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— **Shannon and Steffen Peters**



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